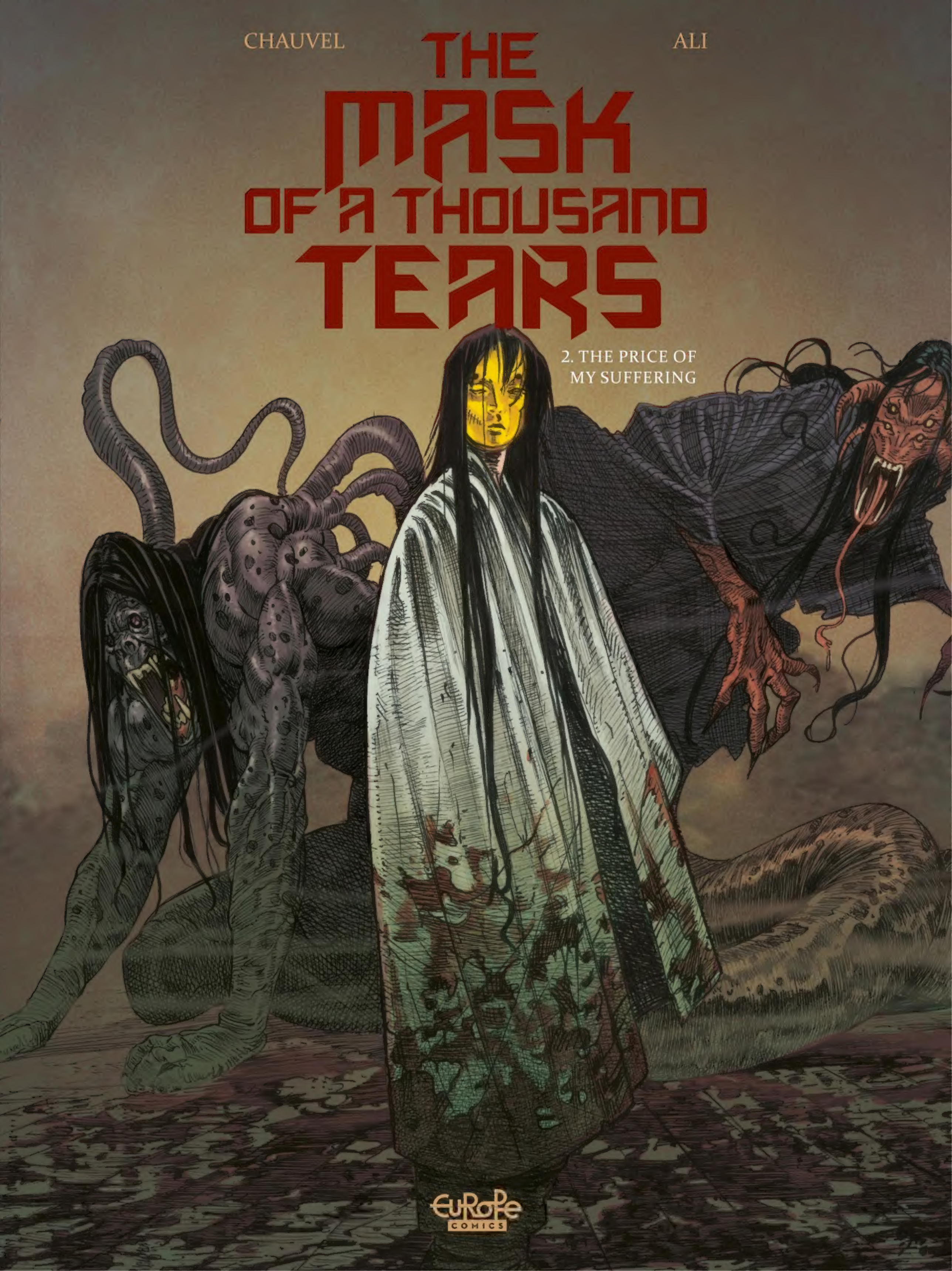
CHAUVEL ALI

THE MASK OF A THOUSAND TEARS

2. THE PRICE OF MY SUFFERING



EUROPE COMICS

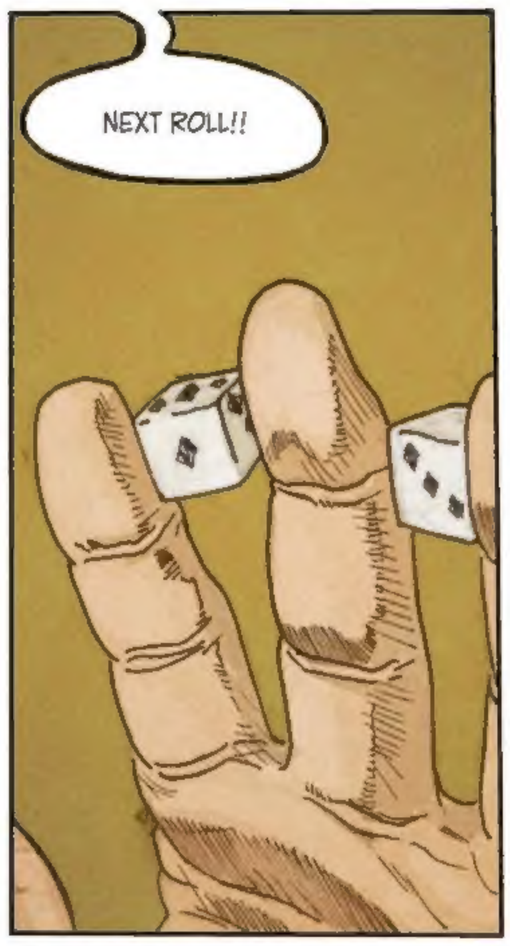
THE MASK OF A THOUSAND TEARS

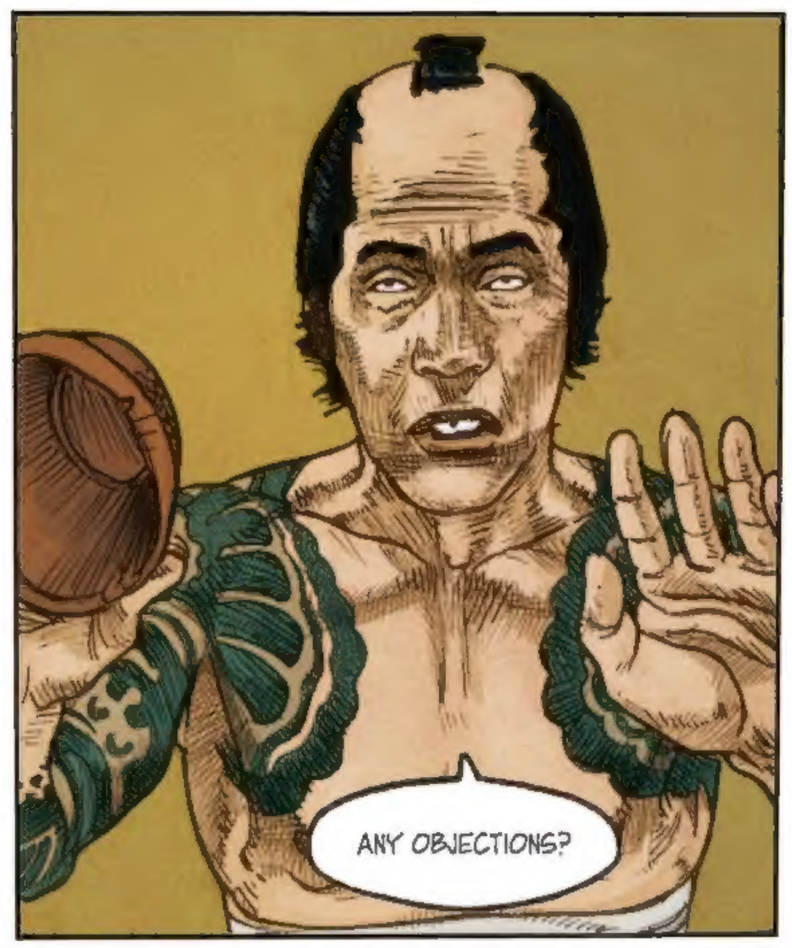
2. THE PRICE OF MY SUFFERING

STORY
David Chauvel

ART
Roberto Ali

COLORS
Walter

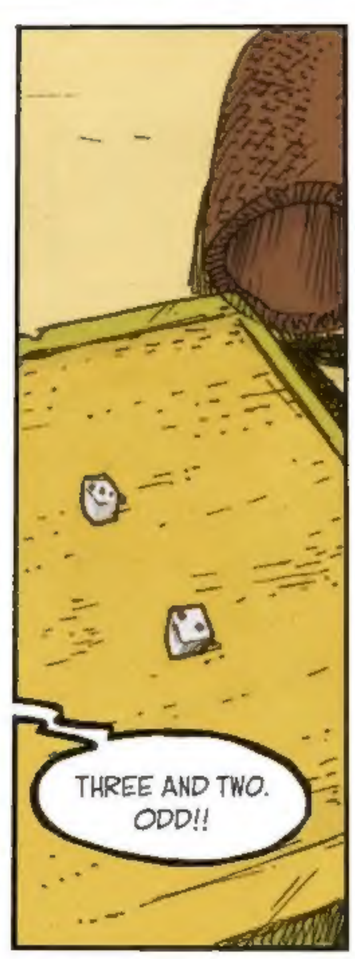

NEXT ROLL!!


ANY OBJECTIONS?

MAKE YOUR BETS!!

ODD!!
EVEN!!
ODD!!
EVEN!!
ODD!!
EVEN!!

HERE WE GO!!


THREE AND TWO.
ODD!!

SURPRISE,
SURPRISE!!

IF I BET ON EVEN, IT'S ODD!! IF I BET ON ODD, IT'S EVEN!!
TWENTY-SIX TIMES IN A ROW!! AND YOU WANT ME TO BELIEVE IT'S SHEER LUCK?!

CALM DOWN, HACHIRO.

I'LL CALM DOWN WHEN I WANT TO!! THEY WARNED ME YOU WERE NOTHING BUT A BUNCH OF CHEATERS.

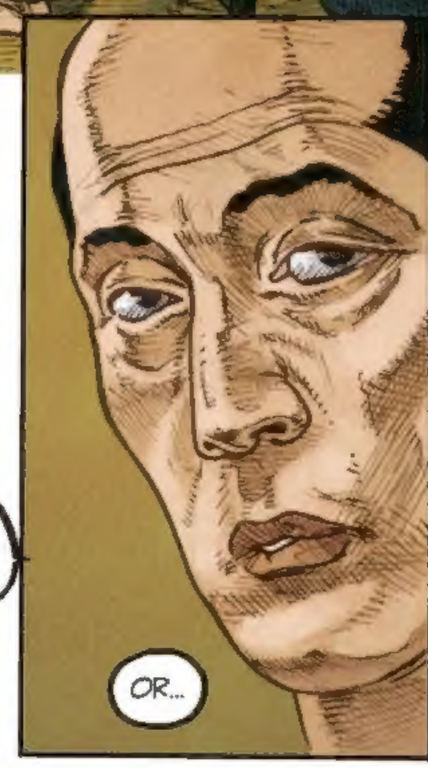
HACHIRO...

I PLAYED TOO WELL LAST NIGHT, HUH?
I WON, AND YOU DIDN'T LIKE IT... SO NOW YOU TAKE IT ALL BACK.

NO ONE FORCED YOU TO COME BACK AND JOIN US.
YOU TOOK EVERYTHING BACK... BY CHEATING...
GIVE ME THOSE DICE!!

NO ONE'S GIVING YOU ANYTHING, HACHIRO. IF I WERE YOU I'D--

SHUT IT!!
I CAN RECOGNIZE LOADED DICE UP CLOSE, SO GIVE THEM TO ME OR--


OR...

DON'T MAKE ME...

click

SO THAT'S HOW IT'S GONNA BE, HUH?!

ZZZZZ!!!

DO YOU KNOW WHO I AM?! I'M HACHIRO, THE TWO-BLADE MASTER, FORMER COMBAT INSTRUCTOR OF THE HASEGAWA CLAN!!
GIVE ME MY MONEY BACK OR BLOOD WILL SPILL AND I CAN PROMISE YOU IT WON'T BE MINE...
HACHIRO... DO YOU KNOW WHO RUNS THIS--
SHUT UP!!
THIS GAME ROOM IS RUN BY MASAMURA.
M-MASAMURA?
WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?
I... NOTHING... NOTHING AT ALL.
I'M SORRY.
GET HIM OUT OF HERE.
INCREDIBLE.
WHAT?
A FEW MOONS AGO, YOU WERE A NOBODY... AND NOW, THE MERE MENTION OF YOUR NAME IS ENOUGH TO MAKE STRONG MEN TREMBLE TO THEIR VERY CORE.
YEAH.

FASTER!!
WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?
DIDN'T ANYONE TELL YOU? THE GUESTS HAVE ARRIVED!!
ALREADY?! THEY WERE SUPPOSED TO ARRIVE--
TOMORROW. YOU DON'T NEED TO REMIND ME!!
WHY DO YOU THINK EVERYONE'S IN SUCH A FRENZY?!
SADAKYO!! KAGAMI!! SWEEP THESE TATAMIS RIGHT AWAY, THEN I NEED YOU TO GO HELP GET THE FUTONS READY!!
YES, MA'AM.
I DON'T LIKE TO STICK MY NOSE WHERE IT DOESN'T BELONG, BUT YOU MAY WANT TO GO TO THE KITCHEN AND MAKE SURE THEY KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON TOO.
YOU'RE RIGHT, I'LL GO--
THE PRINCE!!
?!
THE PRINCE IS HERE!!

YOUR HIGHNESS... YOUR HIGHNESS, I BEG YOU TO LISTEN TO ME, PLEASE.
THE SHIMIZU EMISSARIES HAVE ARRIVED.
YES, AND A DAY EARLY!!
TRUE, BUT--
IT'S COMPLETELY UNACCEPTABLE!!
I SEE YOUR POINT, BUT--
MY CASTLE IS NOT SOME INN FOR TRAVELERS IN A HURRY!!
BUT YOU CANNOT REFUSE TO RECEIVE THEM. IT WOULD BE AN AFFRONT THAT--
I'M NOT READY.
OF COURSE. BUT WON'T YOU PLEASE RECEIVE THEM, BRIEFLY AT LEAST, IF ONLY TO WELCOME THEM?
YOUR HIGHNESS, NEED I REMIND YOU JUST HOW PRECARIOUS OUR SITUATION IS, TRAPPED AS WE ARE BETWEEN THE SHIMIZU AND HASHIMOTO ARMIES?
IF ONE OF THEM SHOULD TIRE OF OUR DAWDLING AND DECIDE TO ATTACK US, IT--
AND NEED I REMIND YOU THAT YOU ARE SPEAKING TO THE EMPEROR'S NEPHEW?
THE TAKEDOS ARE UNTOUCHABLE!!
AND ANYONE WHO THINKS THEY CAN GET THEIR WAY BY TRAMPLING ON THE RULES OF DECORUM IS WASTING THEIR TIME.
THE SHIMIZUS WERE EXPECTED TOMORROW. SO I WILL SEE THEM TOMORROW ...
IF I HAVE NOTHING BETTER TO DO!!

AH, THERE YOU ARE...
I DIDN'T REALIZE MY PRESENCE WAS SO IMPORTANT...
STOP ACTING SMART AND SIT DOWN.
AND YOU, TELL EVERYONE WHAT YOU JUST TOLD ME.
THE SHIMIZUS HAVE SENT EMISSARIES TO THE CASTLE. THEY ARRIVED TODAY AT SUNDOWN.
THEY DIDN'T WASTE TIME...
FROM WHAT I COULD UNDERSTAND FROM THEIR CONVERSATIONS...
...THEY KNOW THE PRINCE WILL OUTRIGHT REFUSE TO FORM AN ALLIANCE AGAINST THE HASHIMOTOS, SO THEY ARE GOING TO PROPOSE TO PUT THE CITY UNDER THEIR PROTECTION.
I SEE...
THE TAKEDOS PROTECT THEMSELVES, BUT WITHOUT GIVING DIRECT MILITARY AID TO THE SHIMIZUS.
A WAY OF STAYING OUT OF THE CONFLICT WITHOUT BECOMING ENSNARED IN IT.
EXACTLY.
DON'T CELEBRATE TOO SOON. GO ON...
THE PROBLEM IS THAT THE HASHIMOTOS ARE ONTO THE PLAN. AS WE SPEAK, A GROUP OF EMISSARIES IS HEADING FOR THE CITY. THEY SHOULD BE HERE WITHIN THREE DAYS. AND THEY HAVE NO INTENTION OF LETTING THINGS LIE.
WHAT DO THEY EXPECT TO PROPOSE? EVERYONE KNOWS THE PRINCE WANTS TO REMAIN NEUTRAL.
AND OBVIOUSLY, THE SHIMIZUS ARE ALREADY OFFERING HIM THAT. THEY'VE TAKEN THE LEAD.
THE HASHIMOTOS ARE GOING TO OUTBID THEM. THEY'LL OFFER TO PUT THE CITY UNDER THEIR PROTECTION AND ALSO PROMISE THE LANDS TAKEN FROM THE SHIMIZUS ONCE THEY'VE BEEN DEFEATED.

THE PRINCE HAS NO USE FOR SUCH PROMISES. HE DOESN'T NEED LAND NOR MONEY. EVERYONE KNOWS THAT.

THE HASHIMOTOS ARE GOING TO TRY ANYWAY. BUT IF IT DOESN'T WORK, THEY HAVE ANOTHER STRATEGY.
THEY PLAN TO WHIP UP A REBELLION THAT WOULD DRIVE THE TAKEDOS OUT OF POWER.

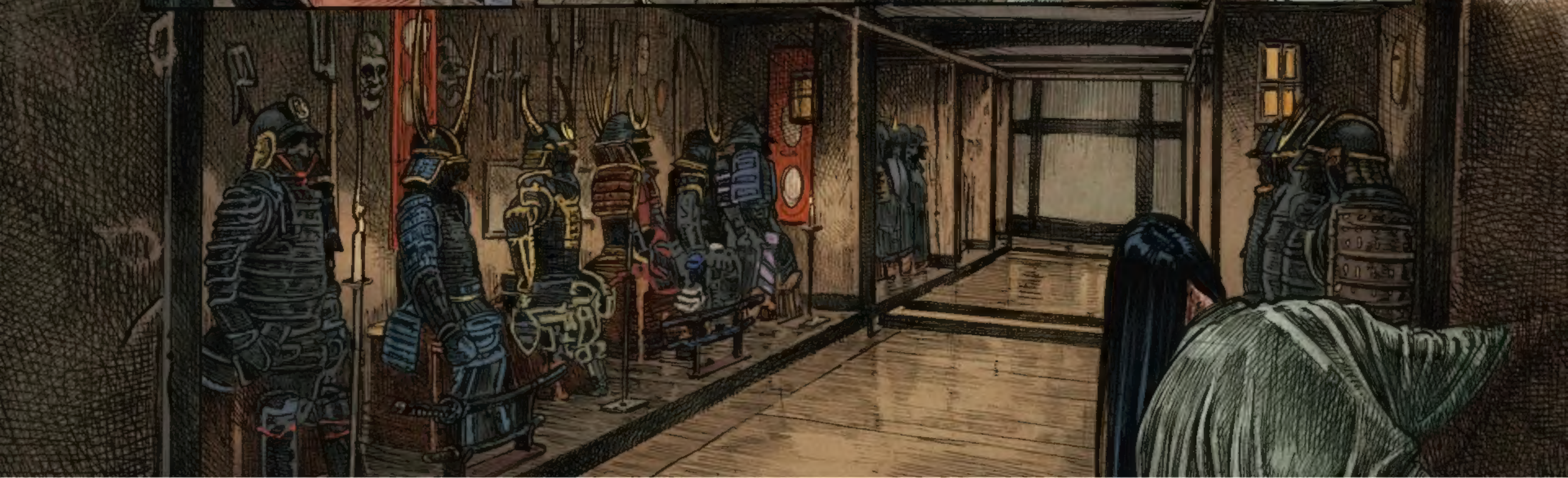
A REBELLION? MADE UP OF WHOM?

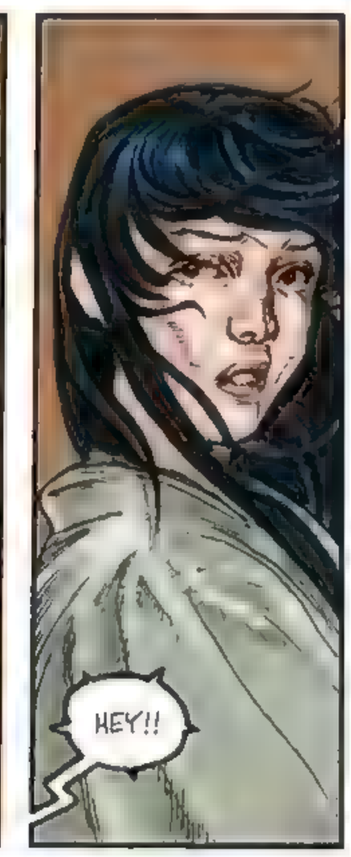
WHO DO YOU THINK?
WHO IN THIS CITY COULD POSSIBLY BE CAPABLE OF GATHERING ENOUGH MEN TO DARE ATTEMPT AN ATTACK ON THE CASTLE?
WE'RE THE ONES THE HASHIMOTOS ARE COMING TO FIND. THEY'LL SHOW UP SOON WITH PROMISES AND A FULL PURSE...
THE QUESTION IS: WHAT WILL BE OUR ANSWER?
IF WE ACCEPT, THE CASTLE COULD FALL WITH THEIR HELP.
IF WE REFUSE, THE TAKEDOS WILL HAVE THEIR SKIN SAVED WITHOUT EVEN REALIZING IT.
AND WITHOUT THANKING US.
YOU READ MY MIND.
SO, WHAT SHOULD WE DO?
I CAN'T DECIDE UNTIL WE KNOW EXACTLY WHAT THE HASHIMOTOS PLAN TO OFFER.
THAT'S WHY I'VE SENT A MESSENGER OF OUR OWN TO SET UP A MEETING.
THE HASHIMOTOS AREN'T KNOWN FOR THEIR PATIENCE. IF THEY AREN'T PLEASED WITH OUR RESPONSE, THEY MAY SIMPLY BEHEAD OUR EMISSARY.
I KNOW. THAT'S WHY I'VE DECIDED...
...TO SEND MASAMURA.

PERFECT, LADIES!

EVERYTHING IS READY. YOU ARE FREE TO RETIRE TO YOUR QUARTERS FOR THE NIGHT.

GO ON, GO ON!! HURRY UP!!




HEY!!

WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE, HUH?!

WELL?!
AH!!
ARE YOU A SPY OR SOMETHING?!
WELL?!
AH!!

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?

WHAT'S ALL THIS NOISE ABOUT?
PRINCE TAKEDO!!
PLEASE FORGIVE US, YOUR HIGHNESS!! THIS YOUNG SERVANT GIRL DARED TO GO WANDERING AROUND IN THE RESTRICTED AREA AND I--
IT'S ALL MY FAULT, YOUR HIGHNESS. I HAVEN'T BEEN WORKING AT THE CASTLE FOR LONG AND I STUPIDLY GOT MYSELF TURNED AROUND...
WHAT IS YOUR NAME?
SADAKYO, YOUR HIGHNESS. I'M TRULY--
SORRY, YES, YES, I KNOW...
ALL RIGHT, NOW STOP PERSECUTING THIS POOR GIRL AND ACCOMPANY HER BACK TO THE SERVANT'S QUARTERS...
RIGHT AWAY, YOUR HIGHNESS!!
HA HA!! YOU THINK I DIDN'T NOTICE?
WHAT?
DON'T ACT INNOCENT.
I KNOW YOU. YOU'RE INCORRIGIBLE...

WHO ARE YOU? WHAT ARE YOU DOING ON THIS PATH?
I AM MASAMURA, EMISSARY OF MIZUCHI MÖN.
FOLLOW ME...

ON YOUR KNEES BEFORE GENERAL IMAGAWA OF THE GREAT HASHIMOTO ARMY!!
I AM MASAMURA. MIZUCHI SENT ME TO DISCUSS THE SITUATION WITH YOU.
A CUP OF TEA?
YOU HAVE A WONDERFUL SPRING HERE. I'M SURE THAT ITS WATER WILL WORK WONDERS ON THE HIGH-MOUNTAIN TEA I BROUGHT WITH ME.
NOT DRINKING?
...
MY BOY, IF I WANTED TO GET RID OF YOU, I WOULDN'T STOOP SO LOW AS A CUP OF POISONED TEA.
WITH A MERE SNAP OF MY FINGERS YOUR HEAD WOULD BE ROLLING ON THE GROUND.
MIZUCHI WANTS TO KNOW WHAT YOU HAVE TO OFFER IN EXCHANGE FOR OUR HELP.

STRAIGHT TO THE POINT, EH?
VERY WELL... BUT BEFORE WE DISCUSS ANY POSSIBLE COMPENSATION, I NEED TO KNOW EXACTLY WHAT IT IS WE ARE TALKING ABOUT.
WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO OFFER?
WE HAVE A HUNDRED MEN DIRECTLY UNDER MIZUCHI'S COMMAND AND ANOTHER TWO HUNDRED UNDER INDIRECT COMMAND.
IF THERE WERE TO BE AN UPRISING, THERE ARE ALMOST A THOUSAND PEOPLE IN THE LOWER DISTRICT WHO ARE LIKELY TO JOIN THE FIGHT.
LOOTERS AREN'T FIGHTERS. THEY'LL KILL OFF THE WOUNDED TO PICK THEIR POCKETS AND STEAL WHATEVER THEY CAN FIND, BUT THEY WON'T JOIN THE FIGHT.
TELL ME, IF YOU REALLY HAVE THREE HUNDRED MEN AT YOUR DISPOSAL..
...WHY DON'T YOU SIMPLY TAKE THE CASTLE YOURSELVES? THERE ARE ENOUGH OF YOU TO PULL IT OFF, AND--
THERE'S NO POINT. THE TAKEDOS HAVE NEVER INTERFERED WITH OUR BUSINESS. THEY LEAVE US ALONE AND THAT'S ALL WE ASK OF THEM.
THEN WHY ARE YOU TALKING TO US?
DO WE REALLY HAVE A CHOICE? YOUR WAR WITH THE SHIMIZUS IS GOING TO ENGULF US NO MATTER WHAT WE DO.. WE'RE OPPORTUNISTS, SO WE'RE JUST TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHAT WORKS TO OUR BEST ADVANTAGE.
THIRTY THOUSAND ZIYS. A HUNDRED FOR EVERY FIGHTER.
AND OUR ASSURANCE THAT YOU MAY CONTINUE RUNNING YOUR LIVES THE WAY YOU SEE FIT.
WHAT ABOUT THE PRINCE?
I'LL PAY FIVE THOUSAND FOR HIS HEAD
YOU HAVE TEN DAYS. THAT'S WHEN WE MEET UP WITH OUR ARMY.
FINE.
WHERE DID YOU GROW UP?
I'LL PASS ALONG YOUR MESSAGE.
TRY TO BE PERSUASIVE.
I'D LIKE TO CONTINUE STEEPING MY TEA IN THE WATER FROM THIS SPRING.

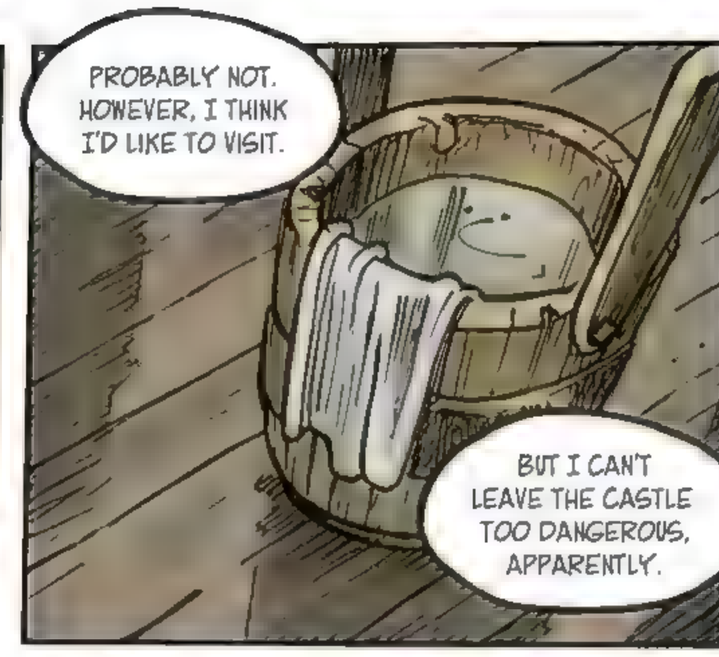
YOUR HIGHNESS, I'M DELIGHTED TO INFORM YOU THAT, DESPITE YOUR ABSENCE AND THE CONSIDERABLE SURPRISE THAT GENERATED, OUR DISCUSSIONS WITH THE SHIMIZU EMISSARIES WENT WELL.
VERY WELL, EVEN.
AS EXPECTED, THEY AREN'T ASKING FOR ANY HELP IN THEIR FIGHT WITH THE HASHIMOTOS. NEITHER FINANCIAL NOR MILITARY AID.
ALL THEY'RE ASKING FOR IS THE RIGHT TO STATION THEIR TROOPS HERE AT MOHISATSU. AT THEIR OWN COST, OF COURSE.
JUST AS WELL...
NONETHELESS, WE'D BE TAKING A POSITION.
IF WE ACCEPT THEIR REQUEST, WE COMPLETELY LOSE ANY CLAIM TO NEUTRALITY. AND IF THE HASHIMOTOS WIN, WE'RE GOING TO BE IN TROUBLE, EVEN IF WE ONLY HELPED THEIR ENEMY INDIRECTLY.
BUT IF IT'S THE SHIMIZUS WHO--
NO ONE CAN SAY WITH ANY CERTAINTY WHO'S GOING TO BE THE WINNER. THAT'S WHY THE ONLY WORTHWHILE COURSE OF ACTION FOR US IS TO REMAIN NEUTRAL.
YOUR HIGHNESS?
YOUR HIGHNESS?!
HUH? YES, I...
PARDON ME, I DIDN'T SLEEP WELL... I'M TOO TIRED TO THINK CLEARLY.
CARRY ON WITHOUT ME. RYOICHI WILL GIVE ME A SUMMARY OF THE ARGUMENTS AND I'LL MAKE A DECISION.

MASAMURA IS BACK
IN HOW MANY PIECES?
ER...
I'M JOKING... SEND HIM IN
BACK ALREADY? YOU DIDN'T TAKE THE SCENIC ROUTE, I SEE...
IT SEEMED BEST.
NO ONE'S MAD AT YOU FOR IT, QUITE THE CONTRARY.
GO ON, TELL ME ABOUT IT... I GUESS IT WENT WELL, SINCE YOUR PRETTY HEAD IS STILL ON YOUR SHOULDERS.
I SPOKE WITH A GENERAL. HE'S OFFERING THIRTY THOUSAND ZIYS. AND A PROMISE TO LEAVE US ALONE.
AND SPEAKING OF HEADS, HE'S ALSO OFFERING A BOUNTY OF FIVE THOUSAND ZIYS TO WHOEVER BRINGS HIM PRINCE TAKEDO'S HEAD.
THIRTY THOUSAND ZIYS... QUITE A SUM...
BUT WHO'S TO SAY THAT ONCE IT'S ALL OVER, THEY WON'T JUST SWAP THE CASH FOR DRAWN SWORDS OR THE NOOSE? DOES YOUR GENERAL SEEM THE SORT TO KEEP HIS WORD?
I'M TALKIN' TO YOU!!
RIGHT, SORRY...
INCREDIBLE. WE'RE TALKING ABOUT HOW WE'RE GOING TO SURVIVE THIS WAR AND YOU'RE JUST--
IT'S OK, I'M LISTENING... I'M JUST TIRED.
HA! YOU DON'T FOOL ME, MISTER!! I KNOW WHAT--OR RATHER, WHO--YOU THINK ABOUT DAY AND NIGHT...

HELLO.
YOUR HIGHNESS...
I... I DIDN'T HEAR YOU COME IN.
EXCUSE ME... I HOPE I DIDN'T FRIGHTEN YOU
NO NO. I...
YOU MUST HAVE FELT FRIGHTENED LAST NIGHT..
THE GUARDS OF THE MASK ARE QUITE BRUTISH, BUT YOU SHOULDN'T HOLD THAT AGAINST THEM. THE TREASURE THEY'RE PROTECTING IS COVETED BY MANY.
SO BE SURE YOU DON'T GET LOST AGAIN.
YES, YOUR HIGHNESS. I...
AT THE SAME TIME, HOW CAN I BLAME YOU? THE CASTLE IS ENORMOUS AND YOU ONLY ARRIVED...
THREE MOONS AGO, YOUR HIGHNESS.

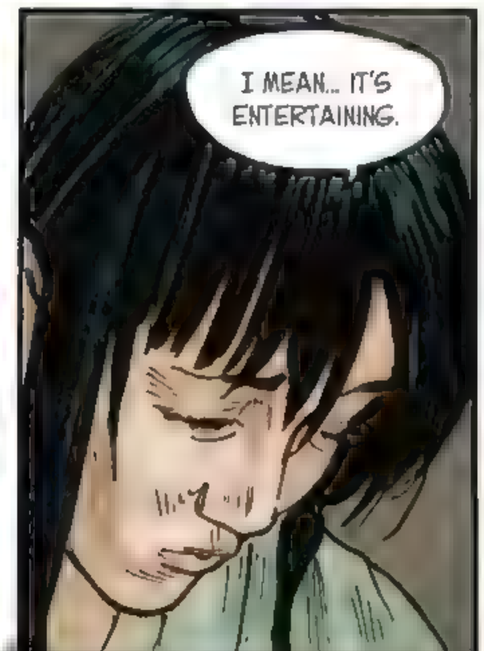
I SEE. AND WHERE DID YOU COME FROM?

A SMALL VILLAGE IN THE EAST THAT YOUR HIGHNESS WILL NOT HAVE HEARD OF.


PROBABLY NOT. HOWEVER, I THINK I'D LIKE TO VISIT.
BUT I CAN'T LEAVE THE CASTLE TOO DANGEROUS, APPARENTLY.

BEING THE NEPHEW OF THE EMPEROR ISN'T ALWAYS EASY, AND THE WAR BETWEEN THE SHIMIZUS AND THE HASHIMOTOS DOESN'T HELP.
I DON'T KNOW WHY I'M TELLING YOU ALL THIS. IT MUST BE TERRIBLY BORING FOR YOU.

NOT AT ALL!!

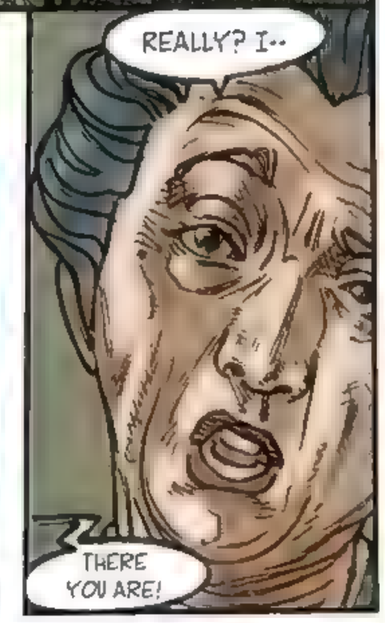

I MEAN... IT'S ENTERTAINING.

HA HA HA!
ENTERTAINING!! HOW VERY CHARMING!! THAT'S THE FIRST TIME ANYONE'S FOUND ME ENTERTAINING. I... I LOVE IT!!

SADAKYO!!

ARE YOU BOTHERING THE PRINCE?
FORGIVE ME, YOUR HIGHNESS. I'LL SEND HER BACK TO THE--

NOT AT ALL, NOT AT ALL.
CALM DOWN, MY GOOD ANEKO. WE WERE JUST... ENTERTAINING EACH OTHER, IT SO HAPPENS.


REALLY? I--
THERE YOU ARE!

I WAS LOOKING ALL OVER!!

OH, IF YOU'RE GOING TO BORE ME WITH YOUR SUMMARY OF--
FOLLOW ME, I HAVE NEWS FOR YOU...

AND IT'S NOT GOOD!!

HERE...
COME IN...
GREETINGS
THANK YOU FOR RECEIVING US SO LATE.
HA HA! IT'S NOT SO LATE FOR US. WE'RE PEOPLE OF THE NIGHT.
HAVE A SEAT, PLEASE... WOULD ANYONE LIKE A DRINK?
NO, THANK YOU. I'D RATHER GET STRAIGHT TO THE POINT OF MY VISIT.
VERY WELL, GO RIGHT AHEAD. YOU HAVE MIZUCHI'S EAR.
WELL. YOU KNOW THE SITUATION.
THE WAR THAT BROKE OUT TWO YEARS AGO BETWEEN THE SHIMIZUS AND THE HASHIMOTOS HAS PUT US IN AN AWKWARD POSITION.

THE STRATEGIC LOCATION OF OUR CITY...

...MEANS THAT WHOEVER MANAGES TO OCCUPY IT AND USE IT AS A BASE FOR THEIR TROOPS WILL HAVE A DECISIVE ADVANTAGE IN THE CONFLICT.

THE SHIMIZUS TOOK THE INITIATIVE AND SENT ENVOYS TO THE CASTLE TO TRY AND PERSUADE PRINCE TAKEDO TO ACCEPT THEIR PROPOSAL OF AN ALLIANCE.

YOU WOULD HAVE THOUGHT THE HASHIMOTOS WOULD HAVE DONE THE SAME THING BUT, ODDLY, THEY HAVEN'T MADE AN APPEARANCE.

WHICH LEADS US TO BELIEVE THAT THEY HAVE ANOTHER PLAN IN MIND... TAKING THE CITY BY FORCE RATHER THAN DIPLOMACY, FOR EXAMPLE.

AS YOU KNOW, DUE TO ITS LOCATION, MOHISATSU IS VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE TO TAKE BY FORCE.

AND A PROLONGED SIEGE WOULD TAKE TIME AND USE UP TOO MANY OF THE HASHIMOTOS' MILITARY RESOURCES.

WHICH LEAVES ONLY ONE POSSIBILITY:

TAKING THE CITY FROM WITHIN, WHICH REQUIRES COOPERATION AND ALLIES ON THE INSIDE.

GO ON..

YOU HAVE MET WITH THE HASHIMOTOS. NO USE DENYING IT, I KNOW IT'S TRUE

WHAT I DON'T KNOW IS HOW MUCH THEY OFFERED YOU. BUT IF YOU TELL ME, I CAN CONVINCE THE PRINCE TO GIVE YOU EVEN MORE IN EXCHANGE FOR YOUR LOYALTY TO THE TAKEDOS.

OR ELSE CONVINCE HIM TO ACCUSE US OF TREASON AND HAVE OUR HEADS CUT OFF.

I DOUBT THAT YOUR HEAD COULD BE CUT OFF SO EASILY, MIZUCHI MÖN.

I STAND BEFORE YOU NOW BECAUSE YOU ALLOWED ME TO ENTER. AND I WON'T LEAVE HERE IN ONE PIECE UNLESS YOU SAY SO.

THE TAKEDOS DO HAVE THE MEANS TO DESTROY YOU, BUT ONLY AT GREAT COST TO BOTH SIDES.

AND ONLY AFTER A BRUTAL FIGHT THAT WOULD REQUIRE FAR TOO MUCH TIME AND EFFORT.

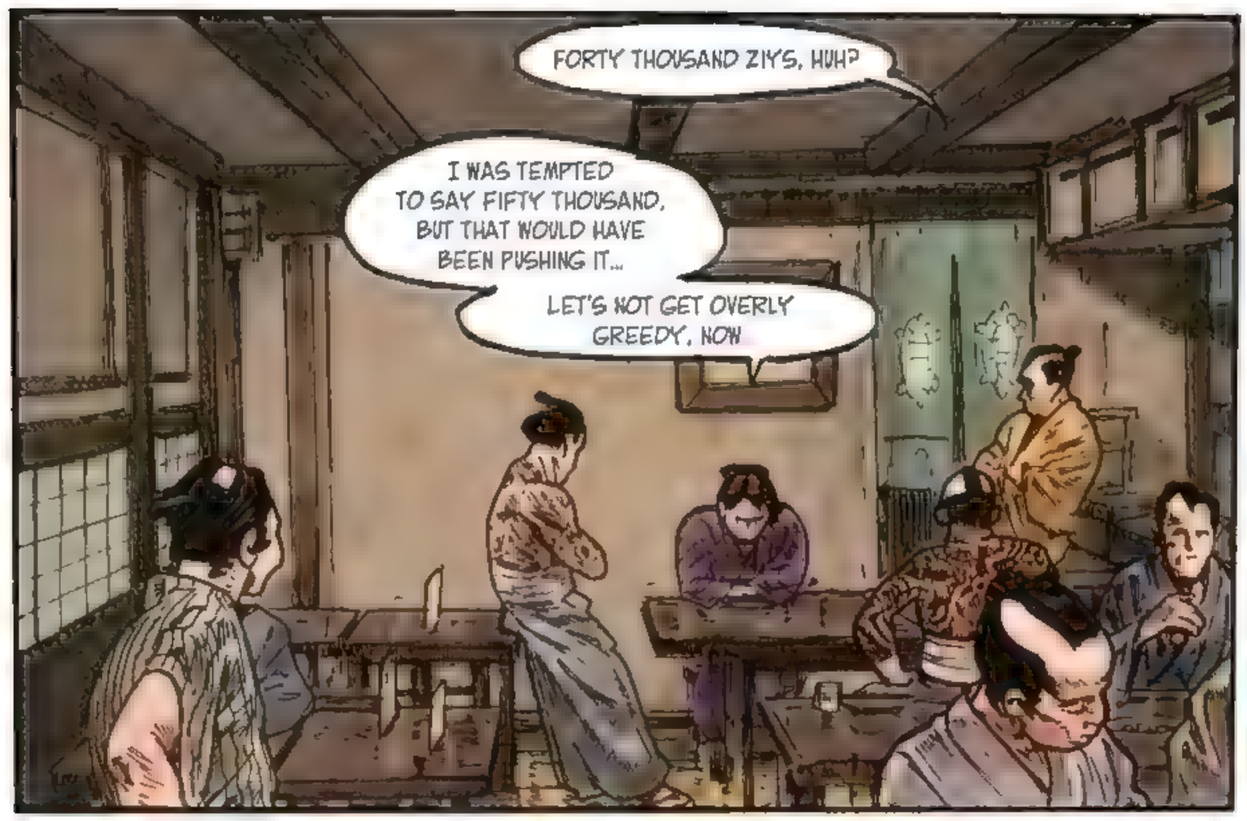
HOWEVER, THE FACT IS WE CANNOT SPARE EITHER AT THE MOMENT

I SEE..

YOU HAVE A REPUTATION FOR BEING FRANK, RYOICHI SAN, SO I'M GOING TO BE HONEST IN RETURN.

THE HASHIMOTOS OFFERED US FORTY THOUSAND ZIYS FOR OUR HELP.

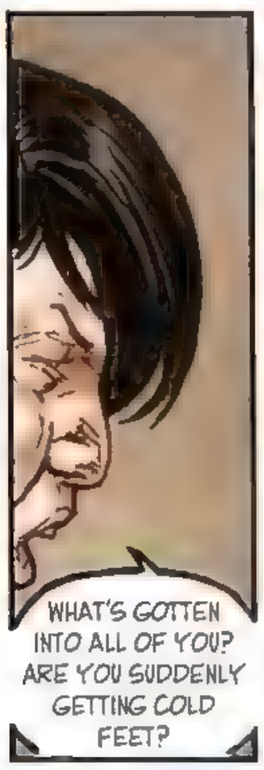
AND TEN THOUSAND FOR THE PRINCE'S HEAD.


FORTY THOUSAND ZIYS, HUH?
I WAS TEMPTED TO SAY FIFTY THOUSAND, BUT THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN PUSHING IT...
LET'S NOT GET OVERLY GREEDY, NOW

...

WHAT?

IT'S A DANGEROUS GAME
ALL GAMES ARE DANGEROUS. AND THE CLOSER YOU GET TO POWER, THE MORE YOU RISK.
BUT THIS TIME... WE'RE ALL IN.


WHAT'S GOTTEN INTO ALL OF YOU? ARE YOU SUDDENLY GETTING COLD FEET?

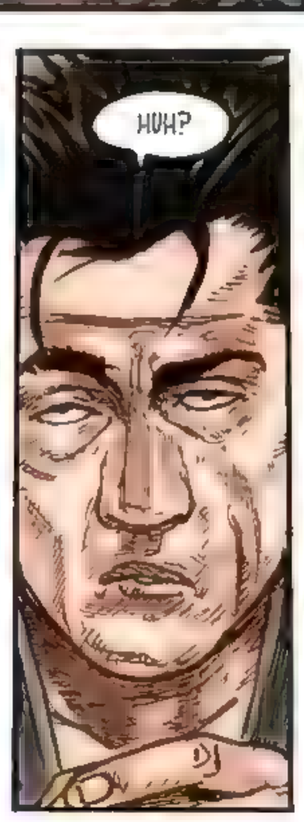
WE HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE OURSELVES WILDLY RICH AND YOU'RE ALL IN A PANIC.
WHAT A BUNCH OF PATHETIC BABOONS.

WE'RE NOT PANICKING, WE'RE THINKING IT OVER. IN THE END, IT'S PRETTY CLEAR.
IF WE HELP THE HASHIMOTOS AND THEY WIN, WE WIN A LOT. BUT IF THEY LOSE, WE LOSE EVERYTHING.

IF WE TAKE THE TAKEDOS' MONEY TO REMAIN NEUTRAL, WE WIN EVEN MORE, AND WITHOUT DOING ANYTHING.
EASY TO SAY NOW...

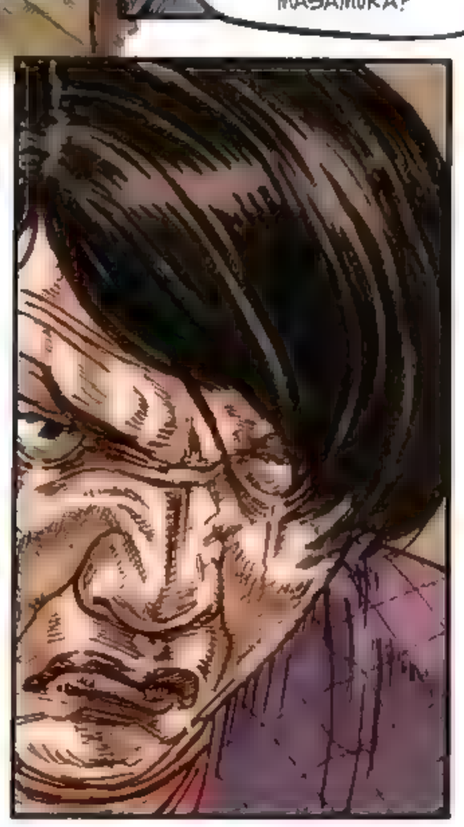
BUT THE TAKEDOS HAVEN'T COME BACK WITH A COUNTER OFFER, SO NOTHING'S SET.
WHAT IS THE OPINION OF THE GREAT AND WISE MASAMURA?

HEY!! MASAMURA!!

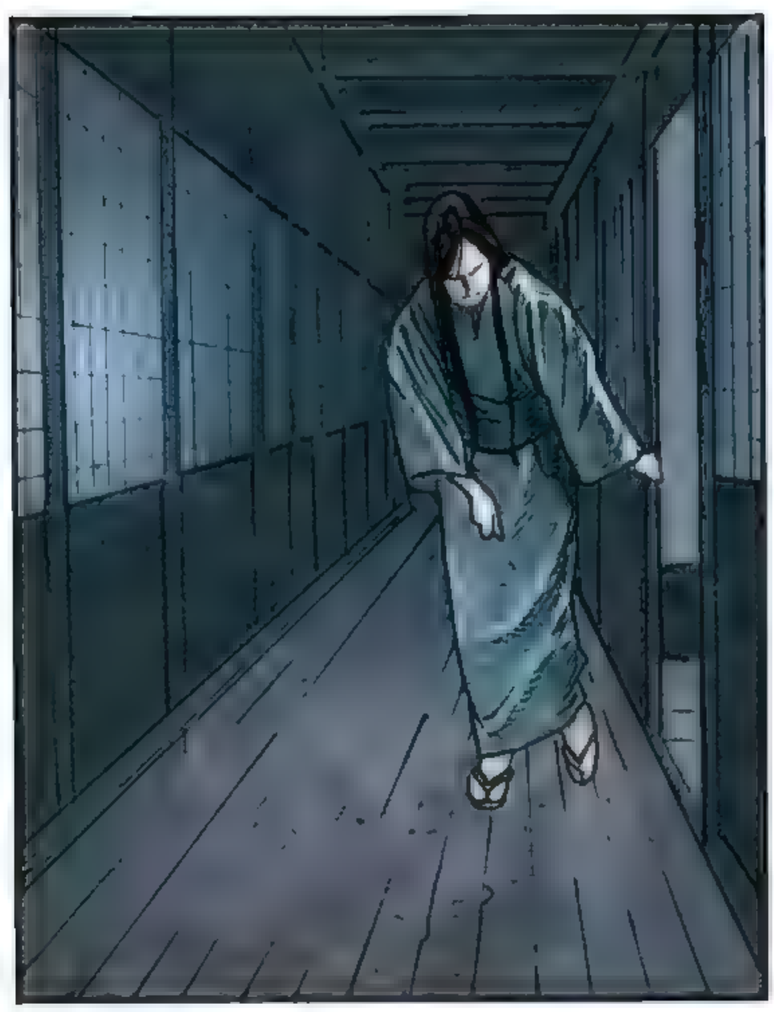

HUH?

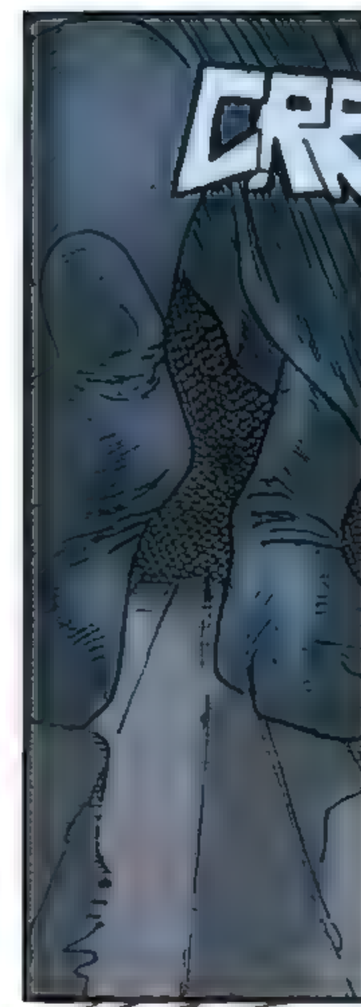
WELL? WHAT DO YOU THINK?

I THINK... ABSOLUTELY... NOTHING.



SADAKYO!!
YES, MA'AM?
WHEN YOU'RE FINISHED HERE, HURRY UP AND GO HELP GET DINNER READY!!
YES, MA'AM!!
MMMM...

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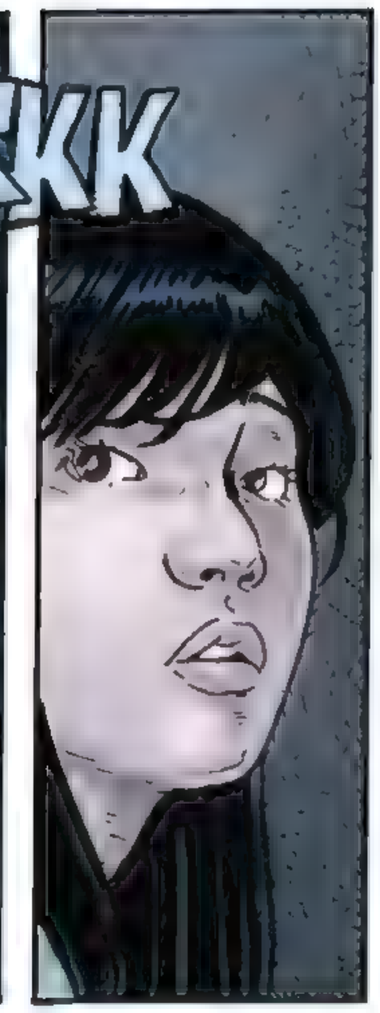
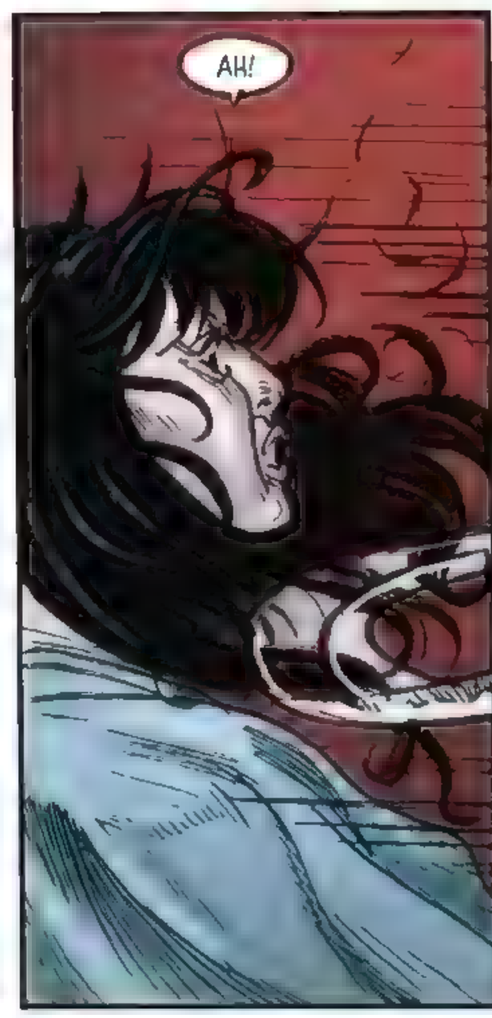
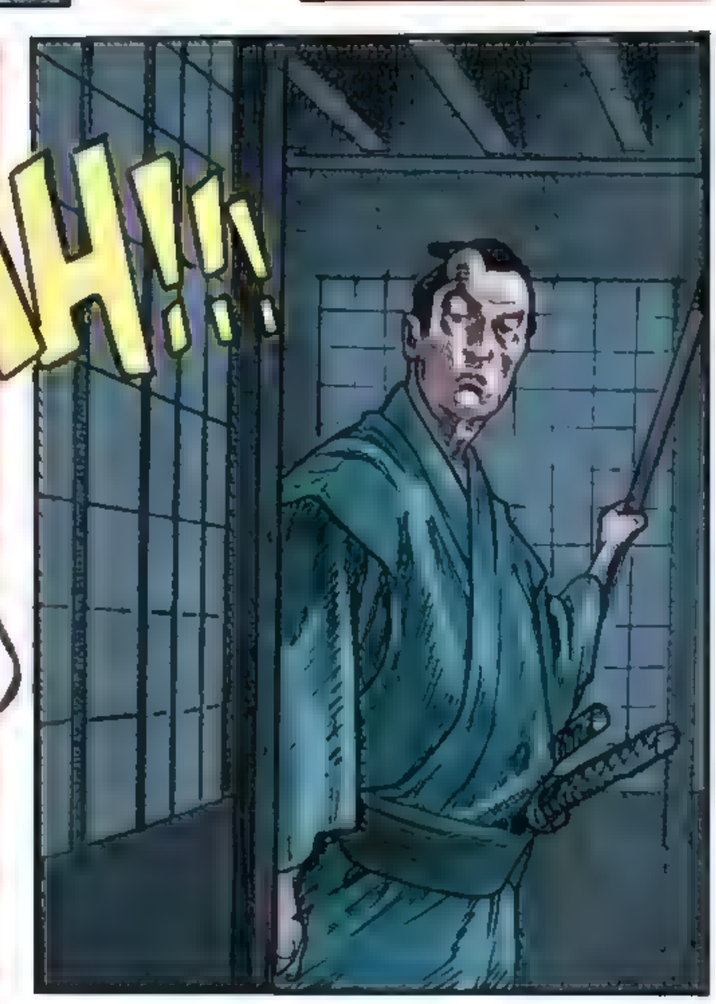


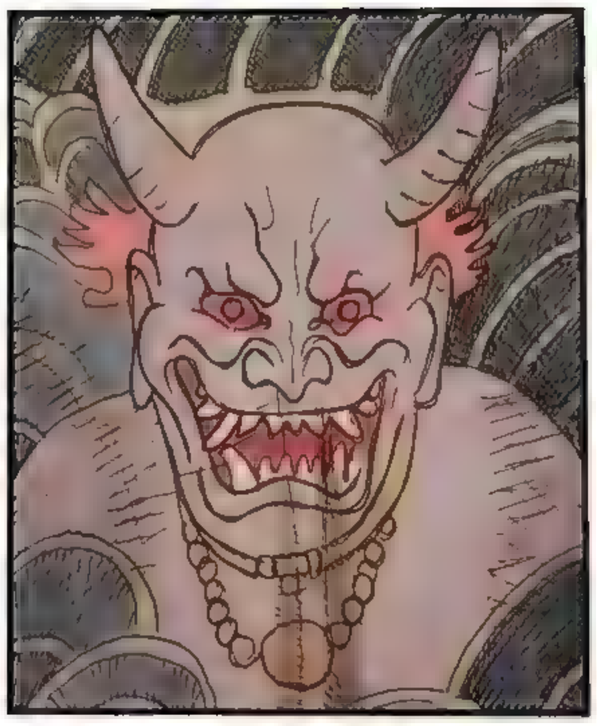

AH!

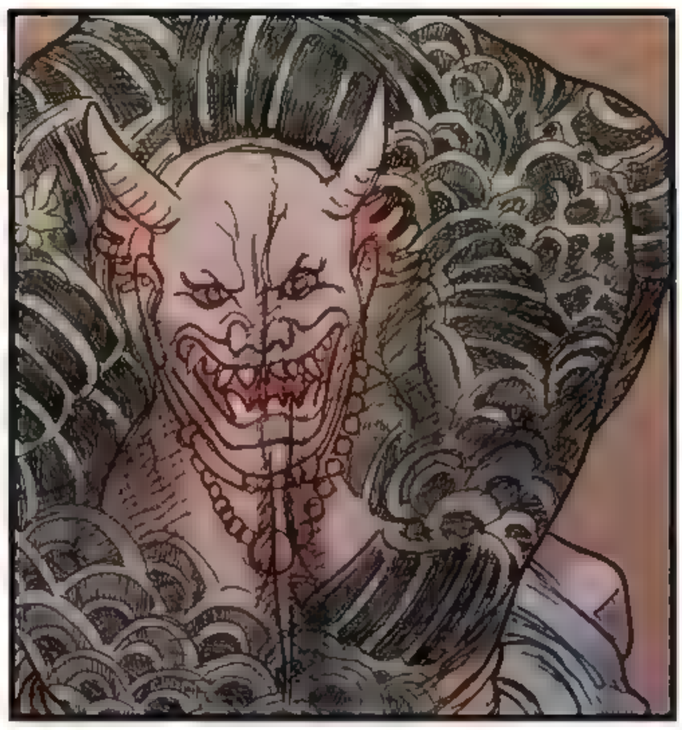
AAH!!!


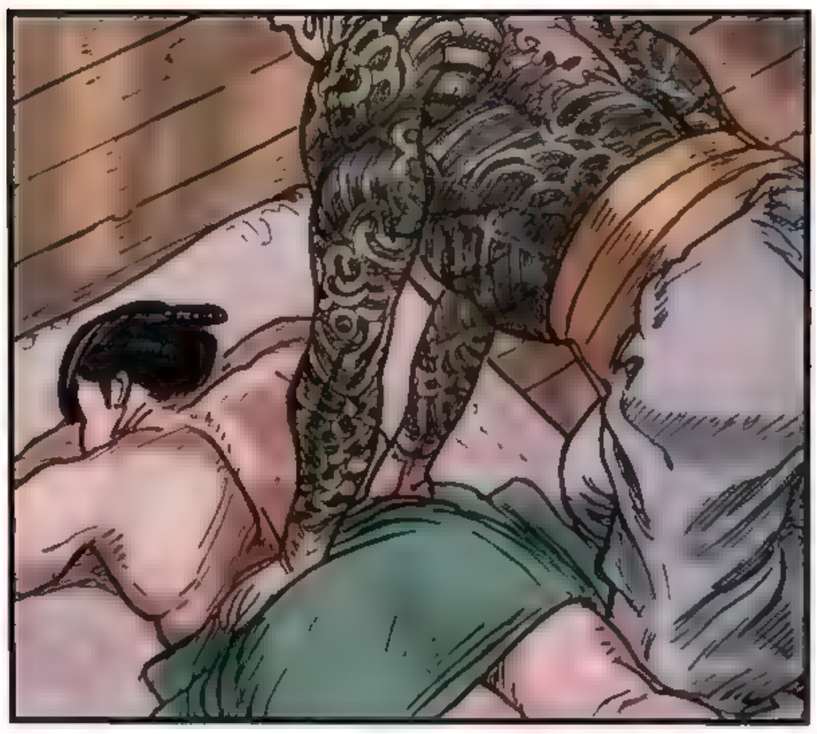
AAAHH!!!
MMF!
HNGH!
HEY!!
HEY, YOU!!
STOP!!
MISS? CAN... CAN YOU HEAR ME, MISS?
MISS? MISS?

WELL?
SHE'S FINE. SHE LOST SOME BLOOD, BUT SHE'S YOUNG AND IN GOOD HEALTH
SHE JUST NEEDS A FEW DAYS OF REST TO ALLOW THE WOUND TO HEAL. SOON IT WILL BE NOTHING BUT A BAD MEMORY.
TO THINK I HAD BEEN WITH HER A MOMENT EARLIER..
AND WHY HER? WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?
I CAN'T HELP YOU WITH THAT
OF COURSE. EXCUSE ME. I WAS THINKING ALOUD.
I'LL COME BACK TOMORROW MORNING TO MAKE SURE SHE'S ALL RIGHT.
UNTIL THEN, MAKE SURE SHE GETS PLENTY TO DRINK AND DON'T HESITATE TO ASK FOR ME IF ANY--
YOUR HIGHNESS..
WHY, YOUR HIGHNESS, WHAT ARE YOU--
I CAME TO SEE HOW THE VICTIM IS DOING.
AND TO ASSURE HER THAT WE WILL DO ALL WE CAN TO FIND THE GUILTY PARTY.
ALL IS WELL, YOUR HIGHNESS.
I WILL NOT HAVE ANYONE THINKING THEY CAN GO AROUND STABBING PEOPLE IN TAKEDO CASTLE.
IF YOU COULD LEAVE US ALONE FOR A MOMENT.

YOU ARE SO LOVELY..
WHO COULD WANT TO DEPRIVE THE WORLD OF SUCH A BEAUTIFUL CREATURE...
UNH...
KO... KOBURO..







CRIC

AH, IT'S YOU...
WELL?

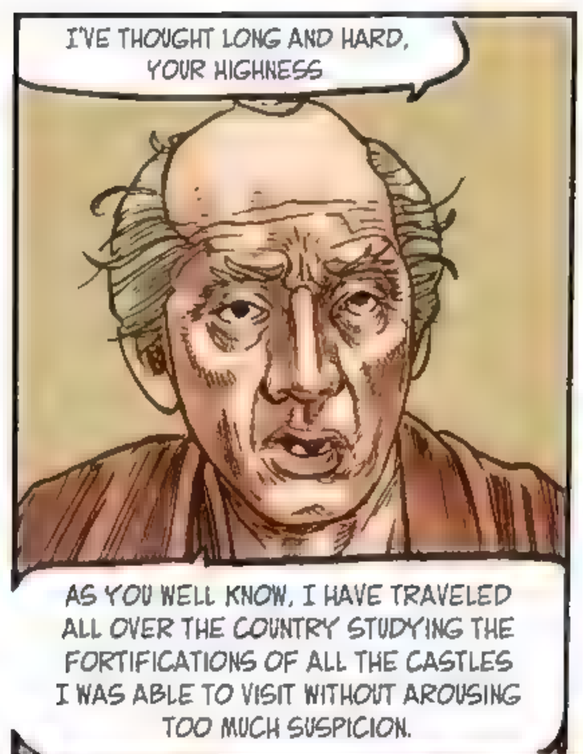
NEVER MIND. YOUR SHEEPISH EXPRESSION SAYS IT ALL.
I WOUNDED HER, AT LEAST...

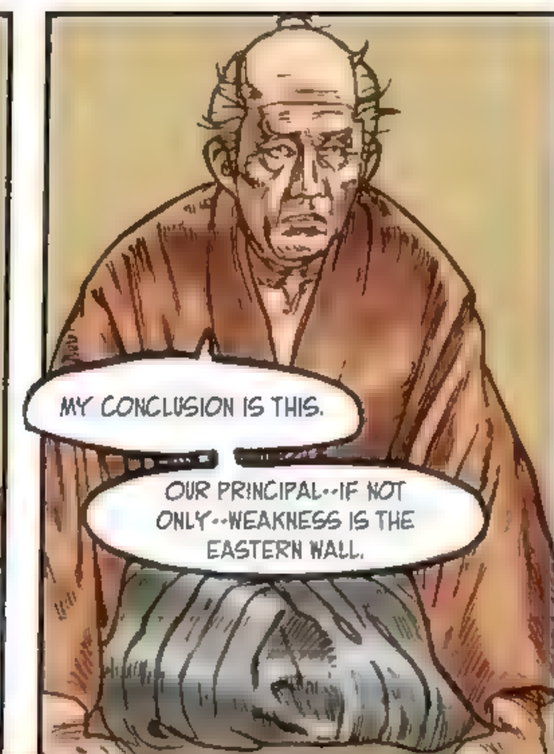
YEAH, YEAH, A FAT LOT OF GOOD THAT DOES ME.
GO ON, SCRAM.

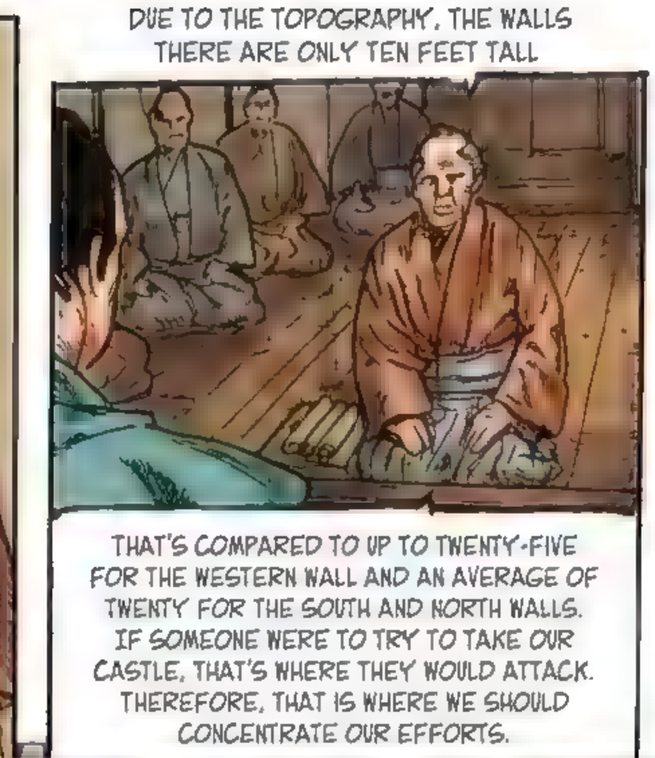
AND... MY PAYMENT?
YOU MUST BE KIDDING!

JUST CONSIDER YOURSELF LUCKY THAT I DON'T CUT OFF AN ARM OR TWO TO TEACH YOU FOR BEING SO USELESS...

PFFFF..
YOU'RE ALL KNOTTED UP, GREAT MIZUCHI. WE'LL NEED TO START OVER FROM THE BEGINNING.
SHUT UP AND MASSAGE.


I'VE THOUGHT LONG AND HARD, YOUR HIGHNESS
AS YOU WELL KNOW, I HAVE TRAVELED ALL OVER THE COUNTRY STUDYING THE FORTIFICATIONS OF ALL THE CASTLES I WAS ABLE TO VISIT WITHOUT AROUSING TOO MUCH SUSPICION.

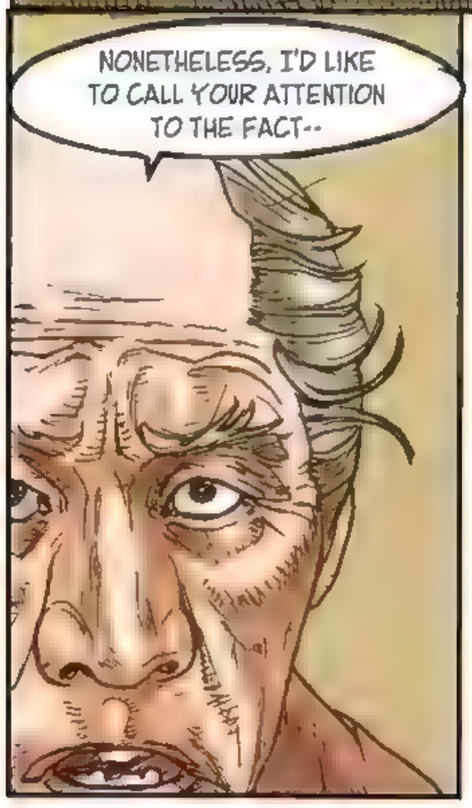

MY CONCLUSION IS THIS.
OUR PRINCIPAL--IF NOT ONLY--WEAKNESS IS THE EASTERN WALL.

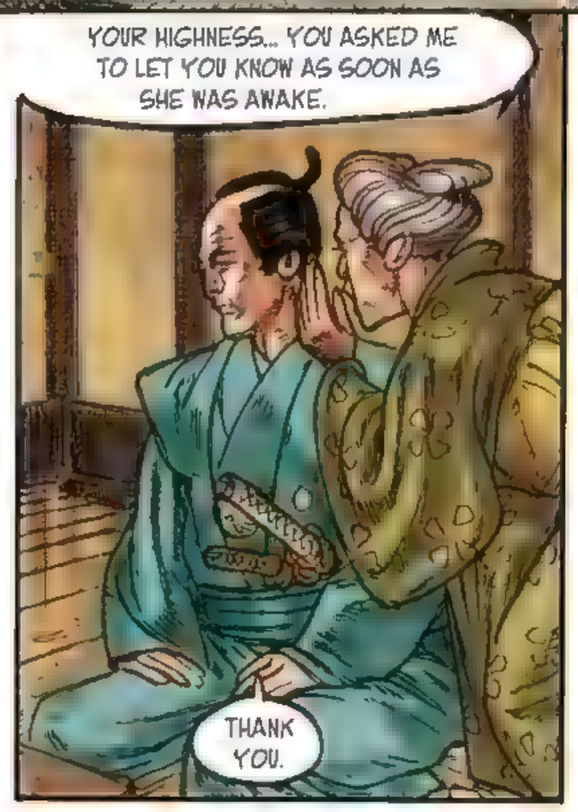

DUE TO THE TOPOGRAPHY, THE WALLS THERE ARE ONLY TEN FEET TALL
THAT'S COMPARED TO UP TO TWENTY-FIVE FOR THE WESTERN WALL AND AN AVERAGE OF TWENTY FOR THE SOUTH AND NORTH WALLS. IF SOMEONE WERE TO TRY TO TAKE OUR CASTLE, THAT'S WHERE THEY WOULD ATTACK. THEREFORE, THAT IS WHERE WE SHOULD CONCENTRATE OUR EFFORTS.

SO, WHAT DO YOU PROPOSE?

A DOUBLING OF EVERY GATE AND THE ADDITION OF THREE SMALL DEFENSE TOWERS EQUALLY SPACED APART, ONE AT EITHER END OF THE EASTERN WALL AND ONE IN THE MIDDLE.

THEY SHOULD HAVE ARROW SLITS AND BARRED WINDOWS. AND NO WOOD, SO THAT THEY CANNOT BE SET ON FIRE... THEY SHOULD BE ENTIRELY DEDICATED TO DEFENSE AND ONLY USED BY SOLDIERS.
IT WON'T BE CHEAP.
WHEN IS THAT EVER THE CASE?


NONETHELESS, I'D LIKE TO CALL YOUR ATTENTION TO THE FACT--


YOUR HIGHNESS... YOU ASKED ME TO LET YOU KNOW AS SOON AS SHE WAS AWAKE.
THANK YOU.

YOU HAVE DONE EXCELLENT WORK.

I'LL LET YOU SEE TO THE DETAILS NOW WITH RYOICHI AND THE COUNCIL MEMBERS.

WELL?
HOW IS OUR PATIENT?
YOUR HIGHNESS...
...I'M JUST A SIMPLE SERVANT. YOU SHOULDN'T TROUBLE YOURSELF OVER SO LITTLE.
SOMEONE TRIED TO KILL YOU
NOW, WHOEVER LIVES UNDER MY ROOF IS ALSO UNDER MY PROTECTION. SO IT IS THEREFORE MY DUTY NOT ONLY TO SEE TO YOUR RECOVERY...
...BUT ALSO TO TRY AND DETERMINE WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU.
DID YOU KNOW YOUR ATTACKER?
I... NO. HE WORE A MASK. I DIDN'T SEE HIS FACE.
DO YOU KNOW WHY YOU WERE ATTACKED? DO YOU HAVE ANY... ENEMIES?
I HAVEN'T THE SLIGHTEST IDEA. I'M JUST A SIMPLE PEASANT GIRL WHO CAME TO MAKE A LIVING IN THE CASTLE. I DON'T KNOW ANYONE IN THIS CITY, I...
DON'T CRY...
I BEG YOUR FORGIVENESS, YOUR HIGHNESS. I... I'M SO ASHAMED TO BE CAUSING YOU ALL THIS TROUBLE!!
COME NOW, YOU'RE NOT TO BLAME.
IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT.

YOU'RE SO BEAUTIFUL...

I...

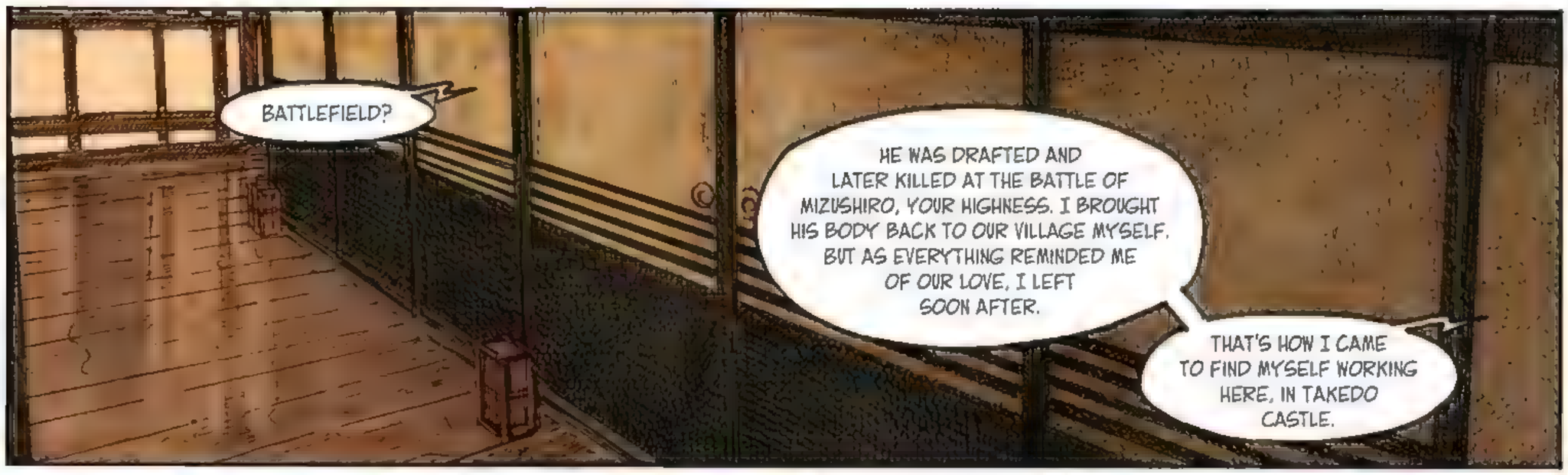
NO.

SORRY.

I...

IT'S TOO SOON... I'M SORRY...
BUT...

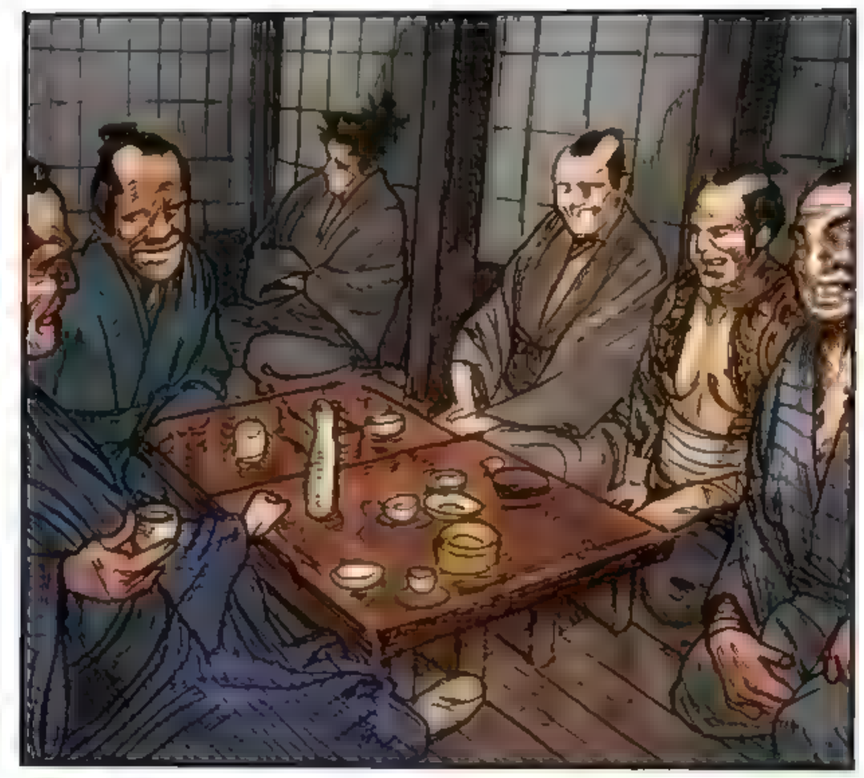
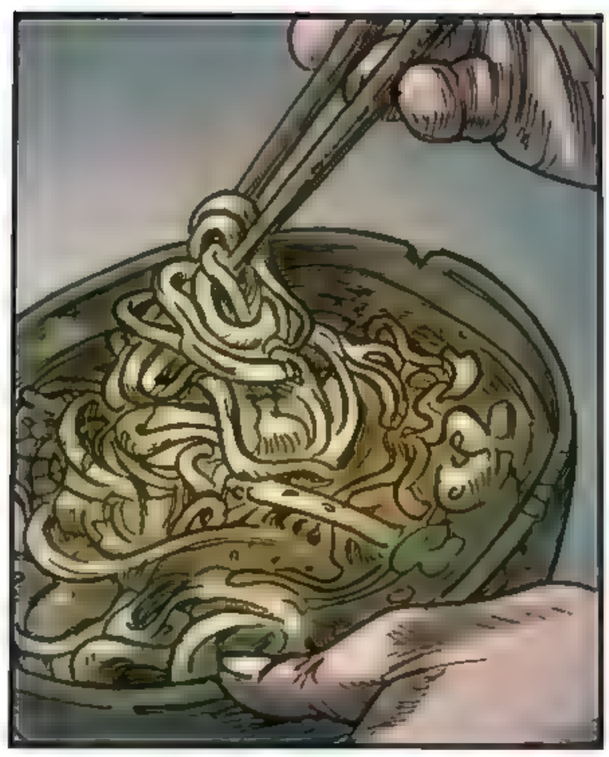
I BEG OF YOU, YOUR HIGHNESS... IF YOU HAVE EVEN THE SLIGHTEST BIT OF CONSIDERATION FOR ME...
..I BESEECH YOU TO HAVE SOME PATIENCE WITH A POOR GIRL STILL IN MOURNING FOR HER FIANCÉ WHO DIED ON THE BATTLEFIELD.

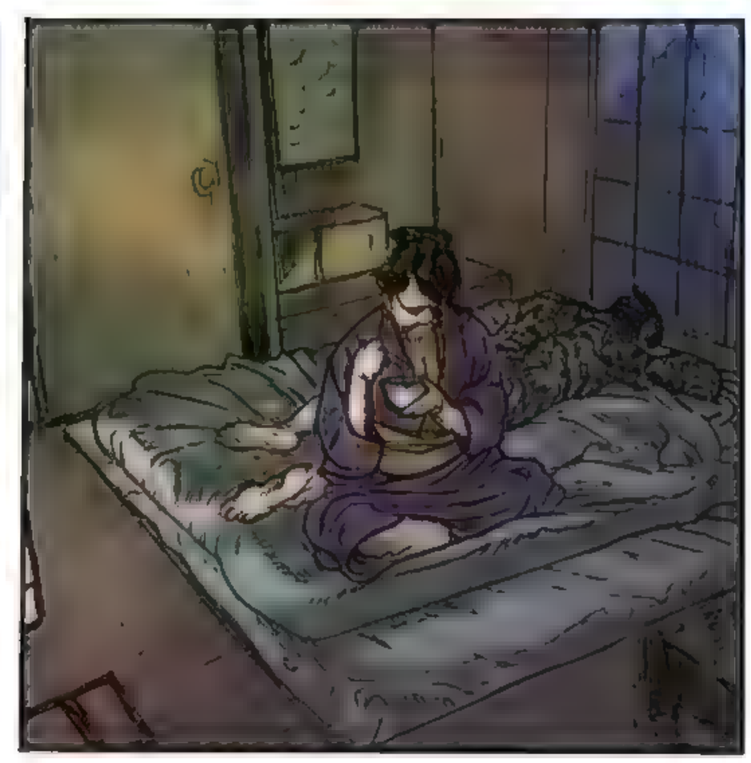
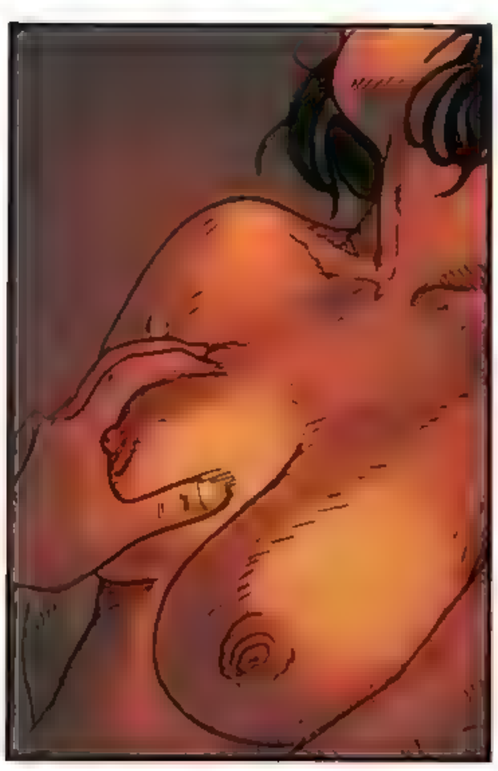
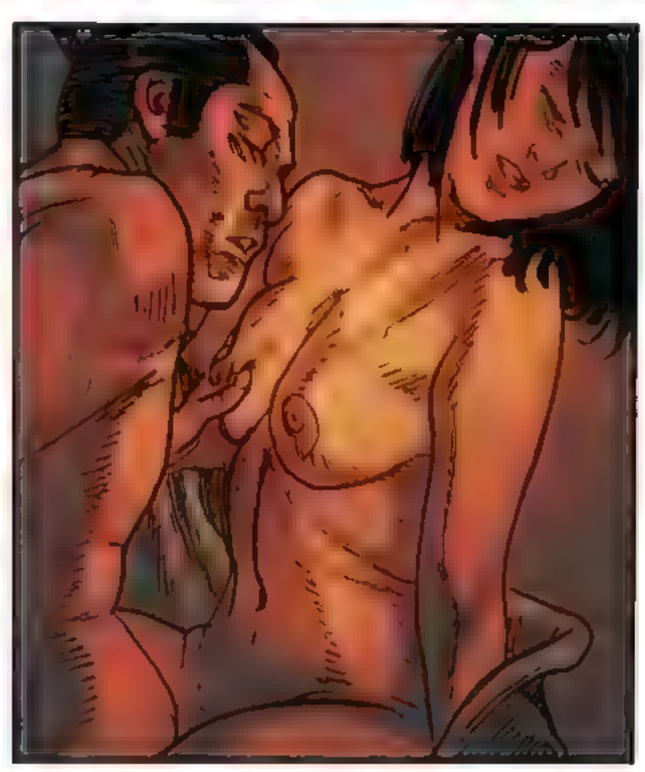
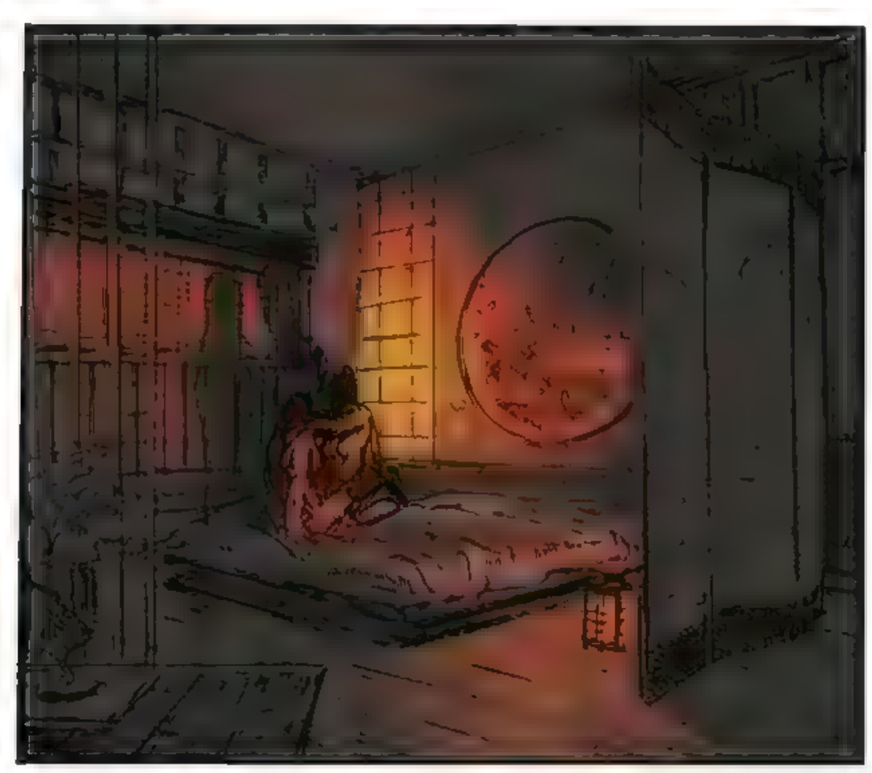

BATTLEFIELD?
HE WAS DRAFTED AND LATER KILLED AT THE BATTLE OF MIZUSHIRO, YOUR HIGHNESS. I BROUGHT HIS BODY BACK TO OUR VILLAGE MYSELF. BUT AS EVERYTHING REMINDED ME OF OUR LOVE, I LEFT SOON AFTER.
THAT'S HOW I CAME TO FIND MYSELF WORKING HERE, IN TAKEDO CASTLE.

I SEE..

THEN IT WOULD BE WRONG OF ME TO BOTHER YOU ANY FURTHER. PLEASE ALLOW ME TO..
NO!!

I MEAN... THAT IS...
WOULD YOU GRANT ME A LITTLE MORE TIME?

YOU'RE SO LUCKY!
I DON'T BELIEVE IT!!
NO WAY!
IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN ME.
NO, ME!
YOU? THERE'S NO WAY!!
TAKE A LOOK AT YOURSELF. THERE USED TO BE AN OLD, ONE-EYED NANNY GOAT IN MY VILLAGE... EVERY TIME I LOOK AT YOU, I THINK OF HER!!
PFFT...
COME OVER HERE AND SAY THAT!!
AHIO!!
OW!!
NOW, NOW!
SOMEBODY TELL ME WHAT'S GOING ON!
HAVEN'T YOU HEARD?!
A MESSENGER FOR THE PRINCE CAME TO CALL FOR SADAKYO JUST NOW.
SHE IS FORMALLY INVITED BY HIS HIGHNESS TO DINE WITH HIM THIS EVENING.
REALLY?
SADAKYO? IS ALL OF THIS TRUE?
YES, MA'AM.
WHAT DID YOU DO TO HIS HIGHNESS IN ORDER TO MAKE HIM SO ENTHRALLED WITH YOU?
I DON'T KNOW, MA'AM.
HMF... IF YOU SAY SO...
I'LL GET YOU READY AND GIVE YOU AN OUTFIT WORTHY OF THE HONOR BESTOWED ON YOU.
YES, MA'AM.

RIGHT THIS WAY, IF YOU WOULD BE SO KIND.
AH, YOU CAME.
THANK YOU FOR ACCEPTING MY INVITATION.
WHO WOULD DARE REFUSE?
THAT'S TRUE... BUT YOU COULD HAVE. I WOULDN'T HAVE HELD IT AGAINST YOU.
WELL... NOT MUCH.
SO, HOW ARE YOU FEELING? HOW'S YOUR WOUND?
IT'S ALMOST COMPLETELY HEALED, YOUR HIGHNESS. YOUR DOCTOR WORKS WONDERS.
HA HA, GOOD TO KNOW. HE WILL BE WELL COMPENSATED FOR IT
ARE YOU HUNGRY?
AS YOUR HIGHNESS WISHES.
I DON'T WANT YOU TO FEEL OBLIGED.
WE'RE HAVING CARP THIS EVENING. IT'S ONE OF MY CHEF'S SPECIALTIES.
THE FISH WAS BROUGHT TO ME THIS MORNING. A GOLDEN CARP WITH LARGE, THICK SCALES. AS IT SPARKLED IN THE LIGHT OF THE RISING SUN, ITS BEAUTY LITERALLY TOOK MY BREATH AWAY.
JUST LIKE YOURS IS DOING RIGHT NOW.

AHH... THAT CARP WAS DELICIOUS. MY COOK REALLY OUTDID HIMSELF.
I TOLD HIM I WAS GOING TO HAVE A VERY SPECIAL GUEST.
A LITTLE MORE?
WHY DON'T WE GO FOR A WALK?
A WALK? BUT WHERE TO? IT'S A BIT LATE FOR A STROLL OUTDOORS.
I DON'T KNOW. THE CASTLE IS BIG. AND FULL OF MARVELS.
THAT'S TRUE. NO OTHER IS MORE COVETED.
OH?
ALAS. BUT NEVER MIND...
YOU WERE TALKING ABOUT A WALK?
YES... ON THAT SUBJECT, THE TRUTH IS I HAVE A CONFESSION TO MAKE. THE NIGHT I WAS ATTACKED... I WASN'T REALLY LOST... WELL, I WAS, BUT... IT'S BECAUSE I WAS LOOKING FOR SOMETHING.
TELL ME.
YOU'LL THINK IT'S SILLY.
NO, NO...
THERE'S... SOMETHING I'VE BEEN HEARING ABOUT SINCE I WAS A LITTLE GIRL
SO, I WANTED... I MEAN, I WONDERED IF...
I SEE.
FOLLOW ME

WHERE ARE WE GOING?
YOUR HIGHNESS?
YOU WANTED TO SEE
..THE MASK OF A THOUSAND TEARS, CORRECT?
THERE.
?!
I'M SORRY!!
FORGIVE ME, YOUR HIGHNESS.

I WANTED SO BADLY TO BE WRONG.
I WANTED SO BADLY FOR YOU TO BE DIFFERENT FROM THE OTHERS.
ALL THE OTHERS.
ALL THOSE WHO TRIED BEFORE YOU ...
BUT... THE MASK...
TAKE CARE OF HER.
YOU KNOW WHAT YOU MUST DO
YOUR HIGHNESS?!
NO!!
NO!!

MASAMURA!!
SOMEONE AT THE DOOR IS ASKING FOR YOU.
WHO?
A GIRL.
SHE DOESN'T LOOK SO GOOD.
DID SHE SAY HER NAME?
YEAH. SADAKYO.
HEY!

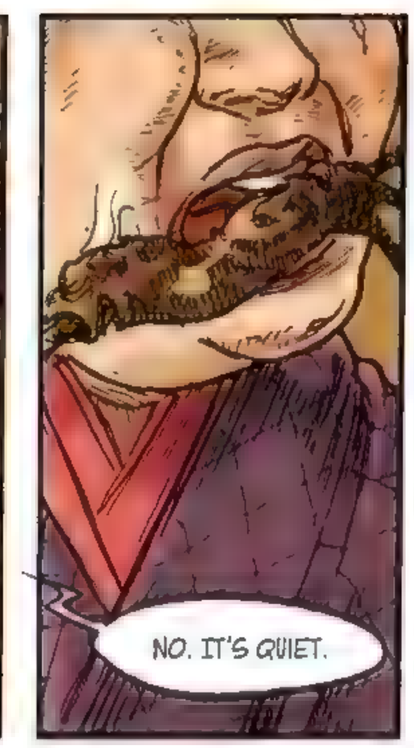
SADAKYO?
MASAMURA, I..
I'M SORRY I DIDN'T KNOW WHERE ELSE ..
SHHH..
IT'S ALL RIGHT
HELP ME!!
WHERE ARE WE TAKING HER?
MY ROOM!!
WHAT HAPPENED TO HER?
I HAVE NO IDEA.
BUT..
WHAT HAVE THEY DONE TO YOU?

THANK YOU ALL FOR COMING.
I BROUGHT YOU ALL HERE TODAY BECAUSE IN THE CONFLICT THAT'S ABOUT TO RAIN DOWN ON THIS SMILING CITY, THERE CAN BE NO NEUTRALITY.
I'VE THOUGHT IT OVER...
...AND I'VE DECIDED TO ACCEPT THE OFFER OF THE HASHIMOTO CLAN.
BECAUSE I BELIEVE THEY ARE THE MORE POWERFUL CLAN. AND ALSO BECAUSE I BELIEVE THEY ARE MORE TRUSTWORTHY.
WHEN THEY ATTACK THE CASTLE, WE'LL JOIN THEM AT THEIR SIDE. IN FACT, WE'LL LAY THE GROUND-WORK FOR THIS ATTACK BY ELIMINATING A NUMBER OF DEFENSES THEY HAVE INFORMED US ABOUT.
I'M NOT FORCING ANYONE TO AGREE WITH ME BUT I'M PREPARED TO SHARE THE REWARD WITH ANYONE WHO LENDS A HAND.
IF ANY OF YOU WOULD RATHER STAY OUT OF ALL THIS...
...YOU MAY LEAVE THIS ROOM IMMEDIATELY, BEFORE WE START DISCUSSING THE DETAILS OF THE COMING BATTLE
GOOD.
THEN WE'LL SHARE THE THIRTY THOUSAND ZIYS AMONG US... NOT TO MENTION THE SPOILS OF THE CASTLE, SEEING AS WE ARE GUARANTEED FREE REIN TO PILLAGE AND LOOT THE FIRST DAY AND NIGHT AFTER THE BATTLE
I REMIND YOU THAT THE HEAD OF PRINCE TAKEDO HAS A PRICE OF FIVE THOUSAND ZIYS ON IT.
THOUGH, IN MY HUMBLE OPINION, NONE OF YOU HAVE A CHANCE OF SEVERING IT BEFORE MASAMURA HERE GETS TO IT.
SEEING AS HOW HE SUDDENLY HAS AN UNEXPECTED MOTIVE...

HOW'S YOUR DOLL?
BETTER. SHE'LL BE ON HER FEET IN FIVE OR SIX DAYS, I THINK
SHE'S TOUGHER THAN SHE LOOKS.
TOUGH, MAYBE, BUT CERTAINLY NOT VERY SMART.
DID SHE REALLY THINK TAKEDO WOULD LET HER GET ANYWHERE NEAR THE PRECIOUS MASK OF A THOUSAND TEARS?
THE ONE ON DISPLAY IN THE GREAT HALL OF THE CASTLE IS A FAKE. EVERYONE KNOWS THAT
REALLY?
OF COURSE. THE REAL ONE IS HIDDEN SOMEWHERE SECRET DEEP WITHIN THE CASTLE... AND FEROCIOUSLY GUARDED.
WE'LL FIND OUT IN A FEW DAYS.
YES. AND UNTIL THEN, I'M COUNTING ON YOU TO BE COMPLETELY AVAILABLE AT MY SIDE.
THE STAKES ARE HIGH, MASAMURA. WE'RE BETTING ON OUR HEADS, OUR VERY LIVES... I KNOW YOU'RE ITCHING TO SETTLE YOUR ACCOUNT WITH HIS HIGHNESS... BUT DON'T LET HATE STAND IN THE WAY OF REASON.
DON'T WORRY.
THE CASTLE WILL FALL. AND THE TAKEDOS ALONG WITH IT.
WHAT'S LESS CERTAIN IS THE ATTITUDE OF THE HASHIMOTOS, ONCE THEY'VE HOISTED THEIR STANDARD OVER THE CASTLE.
THEY NEED US TO HOLD THE CITY. THEY'LL KEEP THEIR WORD.
IF YOU SAY SO...

I KNOW YOU'RE AWAKE.
HOW DO YOU FEEL?
EVERY TIME I WAKE UP IN THE MORNING... IT TAKES A LITTLE WHILE FOR ME TO REMEMBER AGAIN THAT IT'S NOT THERE.
JUST TODAY, I WAS THIRSTY AND I REACHED OUT TO PICK UP THE CUP AND...
AND YOUR... SCARS?
I DON'T CARE ABOUT MY FACE... I'LL NEVER GET MY HAND BACK.
IT COULD HAVE BEEN WORSE. AT LEAST YOU'RE STILL ALIVE.
ALIVE?
WHAT GOOD IS BEING ALIVE WHEN YOU'VE BEEN MADE A MONSTER?
IF ONLY THEY HAD KILLED ME... THEN I WOULD BE REUNITED WITH KOBURO BY NOW
DON'T SAY THAT. I'M HERE...
I'M SORRY, MASAMURA. YOU'RE RIGHT. I OWE YOU EVERYTHING. AND I BEG YOUR FORGIVENESS FOR BEING UNABLE TO PAY BACK THE DEBT
I'M NOT ASKING FOR ANYTHING. SEEING YOU ALIVE IS ENOUGH.
THE ONLY THING I WANT IS TO PAY BACK THE PERSON WHO DID THAT TO YOU IN KIND... AND THEN SOME.
AND THE TIME HAS ALMOST COME

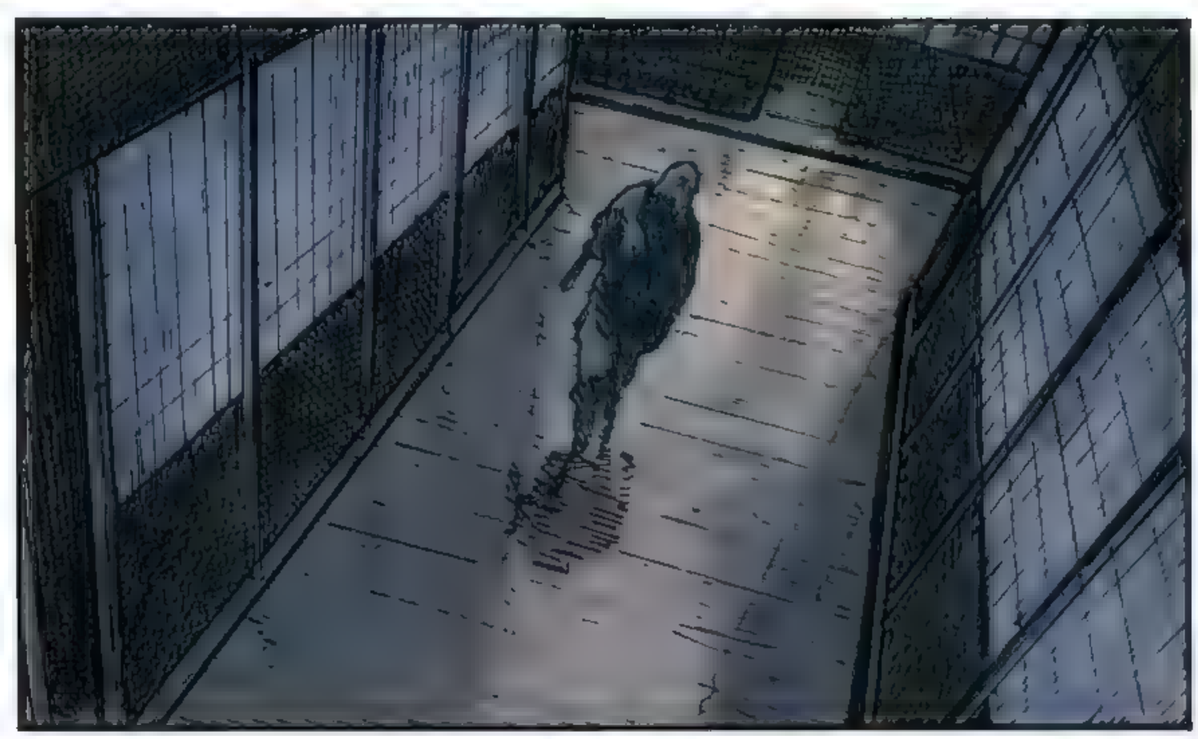
ANY NEWS FROM THE CASTLE?

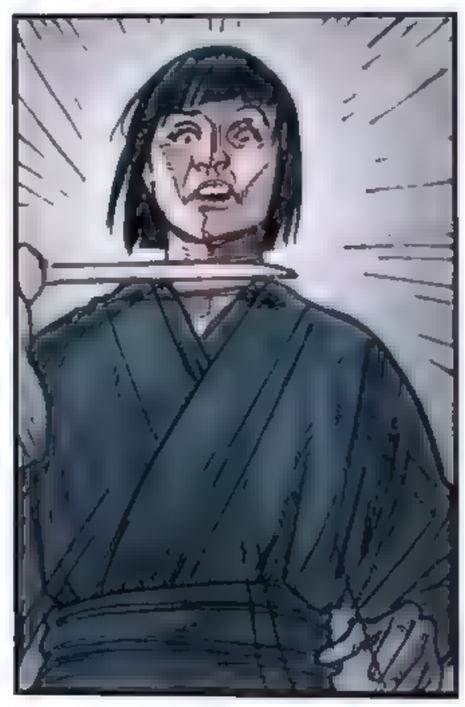

NO. IT'S QUIET.

AND THE NEGOTIATIONS?

NOTHING. THE PRINCE HAS BEEN MOPING SINCE... YOU KNOW WHAT
VERY WELL.
SHOULD I GO BACK TO THE CASTLE?

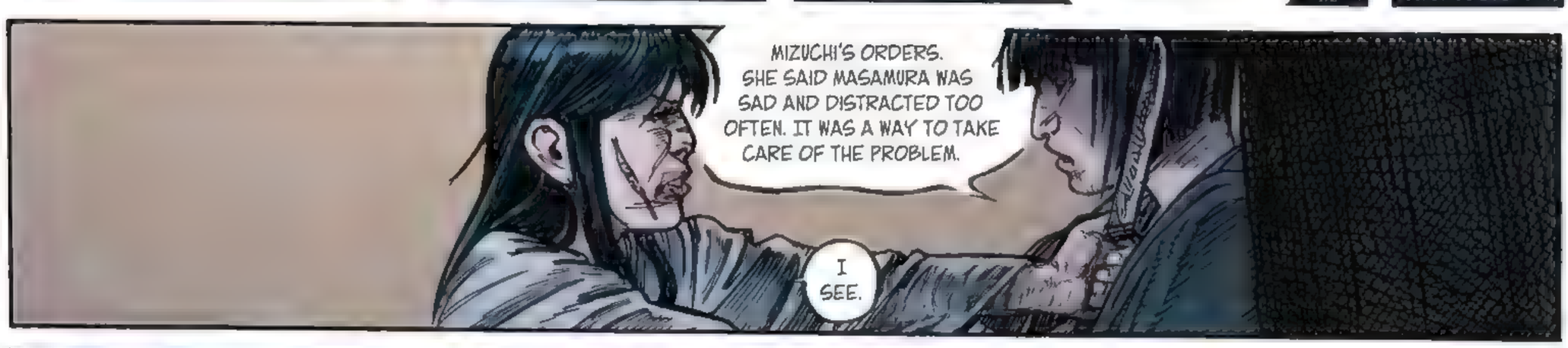
NO. STAY HERE. THERE'S NOTHING LEFT FOR YOU TO DO THERE AND WE'RE GOING TO NEED ALL THE HELP WE CAN GET





DO YOU RECOGNIZE ME? BECAUSE I RECOGNIZE YOU.
YOUR FACE WAS HIDDEN FROM ME, BUT NOT YOUR EYES. AND I NEVER FORGET EYES.

TELL ME WHY.


MIZUCHI'S ORDERS. SHE SAID MASAMURA WAS SAD AND DISTRACTED TOO OFTEN. IT WAS A WAY TO TAKE CARE OF THE PROBLEM.
I SEE.

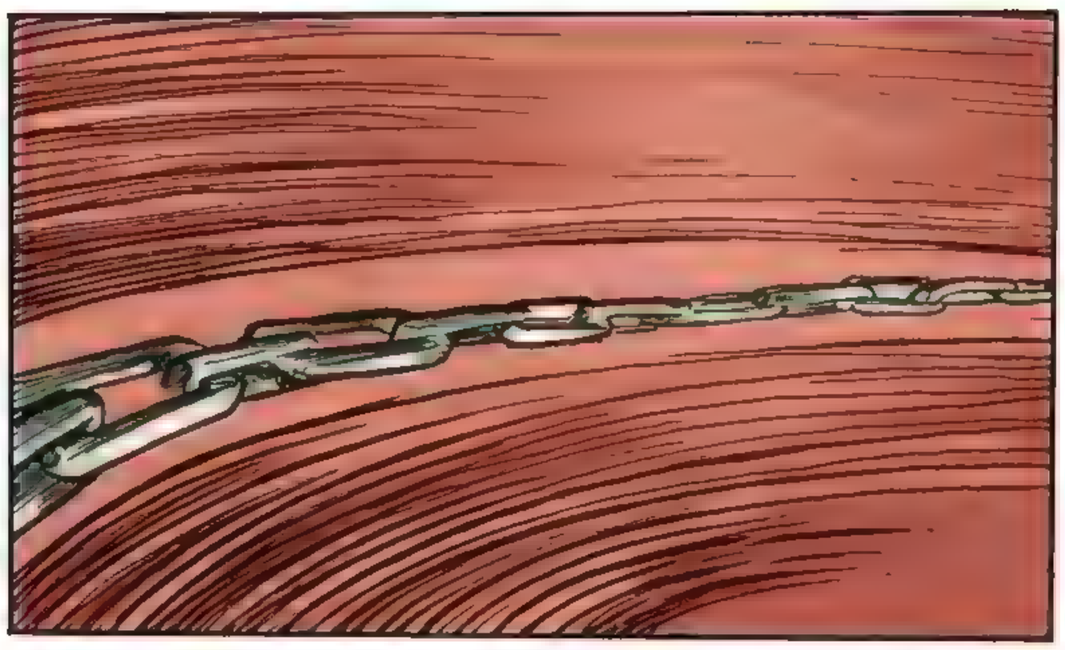
NOW, I HAVE A QUESTION FOR YOU ABOUT... WHAT HAPPENED TO ME. IF YOU ANSWER ME, I'LL CONSIDER US EVEN.
GO AHEAD.
THE MASK.

DO YOU KNOW WHERE IT'S HIDDEN?
LET'S GO

WHAT IN THE--
LRGGLL ooo

SOUND THE ALARM!!
WARN THE PRINCE, QUICKLY!
WHAT ARE YOU TALKI--
HUNDREDS OF THEM! THERE, AT THE MAIN GATE!!
TAKEDO!!
TAKEDO!! WAKE UP!!
RYOICHI?
WHAT ARE YOU--?!
THE CASTLE'S UNDER ATTACK!!

YAAAH !!
TESHINOBO!!
TAKE CHARGE OF GETTING THE GATES OPEN WHEN WE'RE IN POSITION!!
RIGHT AWAY!!
AND LOOK WHO'S HERE...
LOOK!!
THE HASHIMOTOS!!
THE HASHIMOTOS ARE COMING!!



AARGG!!

NGGG...
WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?
KILL HIM!!
AAH!!
GGGNN...
GRRRGG...
RAAH!!

THE HASHIMOTOS... THOSE TRAITORS...
IT'S JUST AS WE HAD WARNED YOU.
YOUR HIGHNESS... WE MUST LEAVE RIGHT AWAY.
LEAVE?
YOU MEAN FLEE? IS THAT IT?
I...
NO TAKEDO HAS EVER FLED FROM AN ENEMY AND I DON'T INTEND TO BE THE FIRST TO INCUR THAT PARTICULAR HUMILIATION..
BUT... YOUR GREAT-UNCLE, THE EMPEROR...
HE'S RIGHT. THE EMPEROR WILL BRING THE HASHIMOTOS BACK IN LINE. HE--
SILENCE!!
FLEE? ABANDON OUR PEOPLE?! HAVE YOU NO DIGNITY AT ALL?!
WE'LL DEFEND THIS CASTLE TO THE DEATH.
URGH!!
YOU JUST HAVE TO ASK.

URGH !!
NO!!
A COMMON ARROW IS UNWORTHY OF A PRINCE.
HE DESERVES A MORE NOBLE DEMISE.
YAAAH!!
HNGH...
UNNH!
CHCLING
PFFT...
IS THAT IT?

I WARN YOU, IF YOU PULL SOMETHING LIKE THAT AGAIN, I'M LEAVING YOU BEHIND.

AND YOU CAN SEE HOW FAR YOU'LL GET FINDING YOUR STUPID MASK WITHOUT ME.
I'M SORRY...

GOOD.
I WANT TO PAY OFF MY DEBT TO YOU, BUT IF YOU PUT ME IN HARM'S WAY AGAIN, I SWEAR...

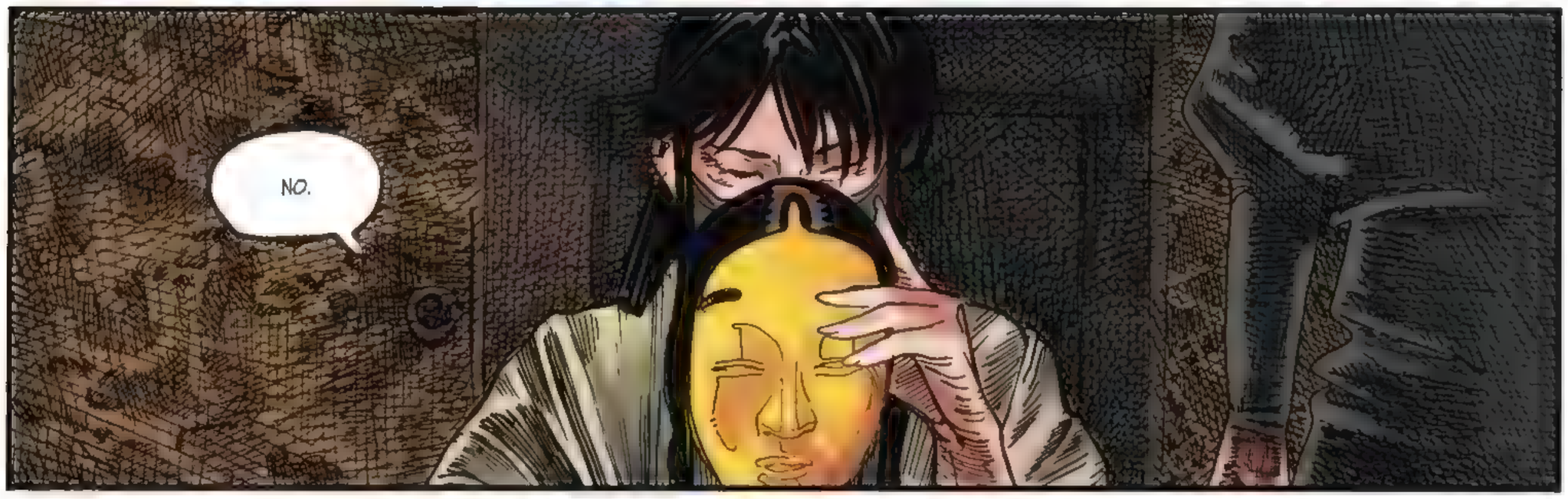
I UNDERSTAND

HERE WE ARE.

WHAT IS...
ARE YOU KIDDING?
CALM DOWN
TO THINK YOU BELIEVED THAT THE TAKEDOS WOULD BE FOOLISH ENOUGH...
...TO LEAVE THE MASK ACCESSIBLE ...
...TO ANYONE.

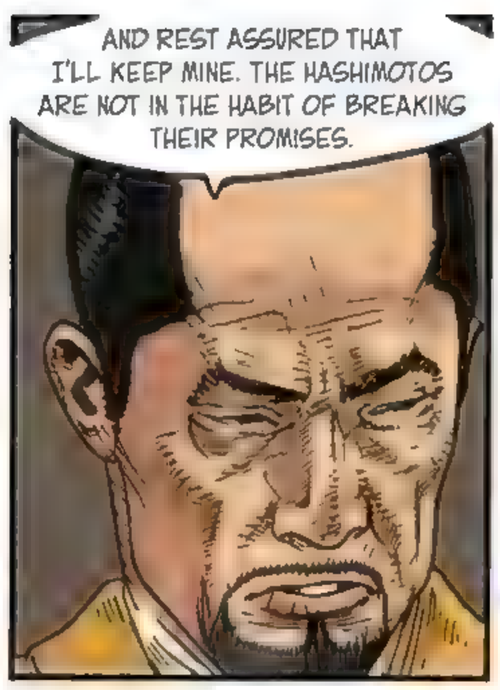
IF YOU KNEW IT WAS HIDDEN THERE...
...WHY DIDN'T YOU STEAL IT?
AND DO WHAT WITH IT?
YOU KNOW WHAT THAT MASK IS FOR, DON'T YOU?
I HAVE NO DESIRE TO DESCEND TO HELL...
ME NEITHER.
BUT I HAVE NO CHOICE.
I MADE A PROMISE.

ARE YOU SURE YOU WANT TO DO THAT?


NO.

NO.

CHEERS!!
HA HA! CHEERS!!
LONG LIVE THE PRINCE!!
HA HA HA!!
POOR PRINCE. HE DIDN'T LAST LONG.
IN FAIRNESS, HE DIDN'T STAND A CHANCE AGAINST MASAMURA...
WE'LL DEFEND THE CASTLE TO THE DEATH...
AS YOU WISH!!
HEY!!
WHY YOU...
OH!! OH!!
HA HA HA!!
BOW BEFORE THE GREAT GENERAL IMAGAWA!!
DID HE TELL US TO "BOW"?
I BELIEVE SO.
I PRESUME YOU ARE MIZUCHI MÖN.
YOU PRESUME CORRECTLY, GENERAL.
WE'VE BEEN EXPECTING YOU.
AS YOU CAN SEE, WE HAVE KEPT OUR PART OF THE BARGAIN.


AND REST ASSURED THAT I'LL KEEP MINE. THE HASHIMOTOS ARE NOT IN THE HABIT OF BREAKING THEIR PROMISES.

TOMORROW AT DAWN, THE SUM WE OWE YOU WILL BE BROUGHT TO THE GREAT COURTYARD.

AND THE BOUNTY.

AND THE BOUNTY. AFTER THAT, YOU WILL LEAVE THE CASTLE AND NEVER COME BACK.

YOUR WISH IS OUR COMMAND.
THERE'S NOTHIN' LEFT TO DRINK ANYWAY.

HA HA HA!!

THEN THIS IS WHERE WE PART WAYS.
DON'T FORGET, TOMORROW MOR--

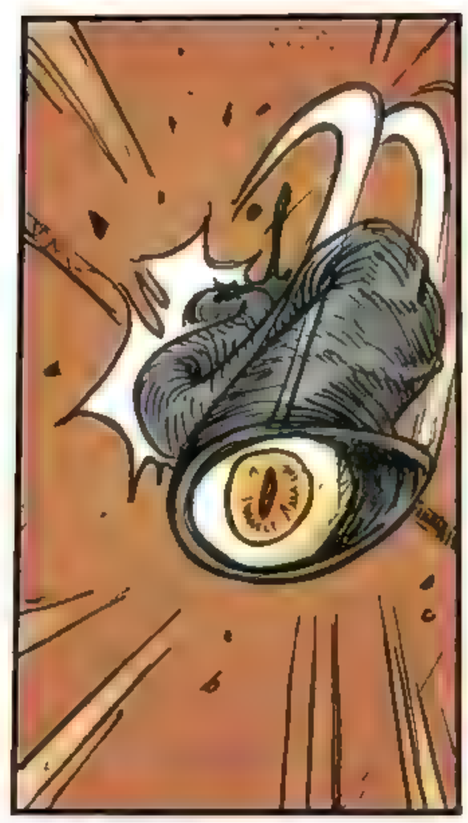
AAAHH!

WHAT'S...?

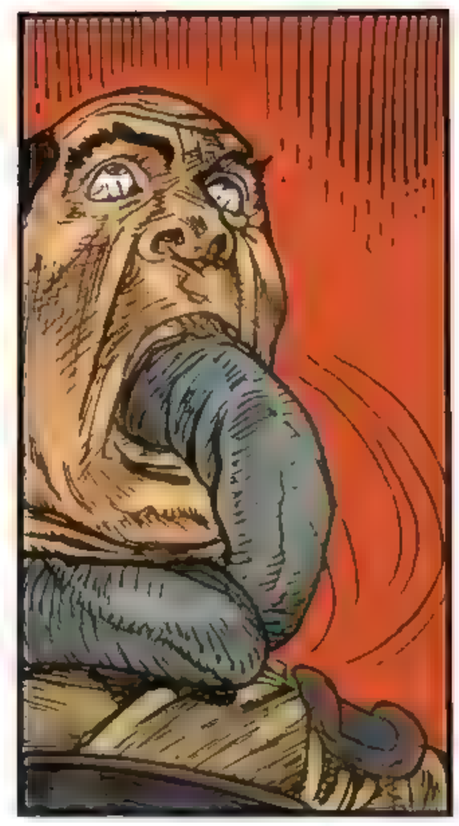
HEY, YOU!!
MY GOD..

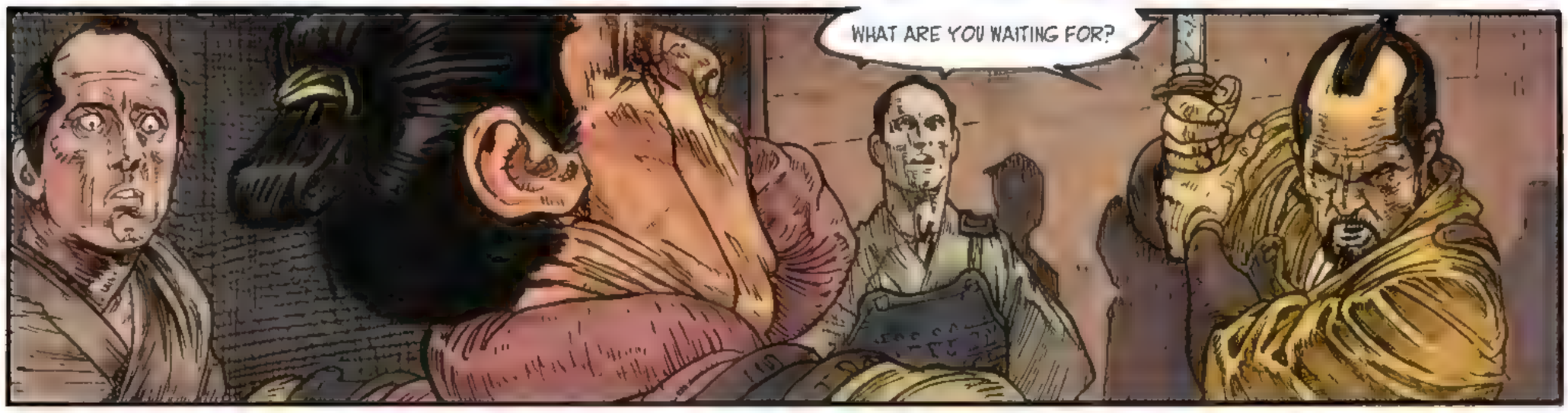
WHAT'S HAPPENED--

TSUBASA!! WHO DID THIS TO YOU?
THE DEMONS..
WHAT?
THE MASK.. SHE.. SHE..
SHE? WHO DO YOU MEAN, SHE? YOU MEAN--
SADAKYO, YES. SHE PUT ON THE MASK, AND... SHE WENT TO HELL.
AND SHE... SHE...
SHE WHAT?
SPEAK!!
BY ALL THE DEVILS... WHAT IS GOING ON HERE?!



WHAT··




WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?

ARRGHH!

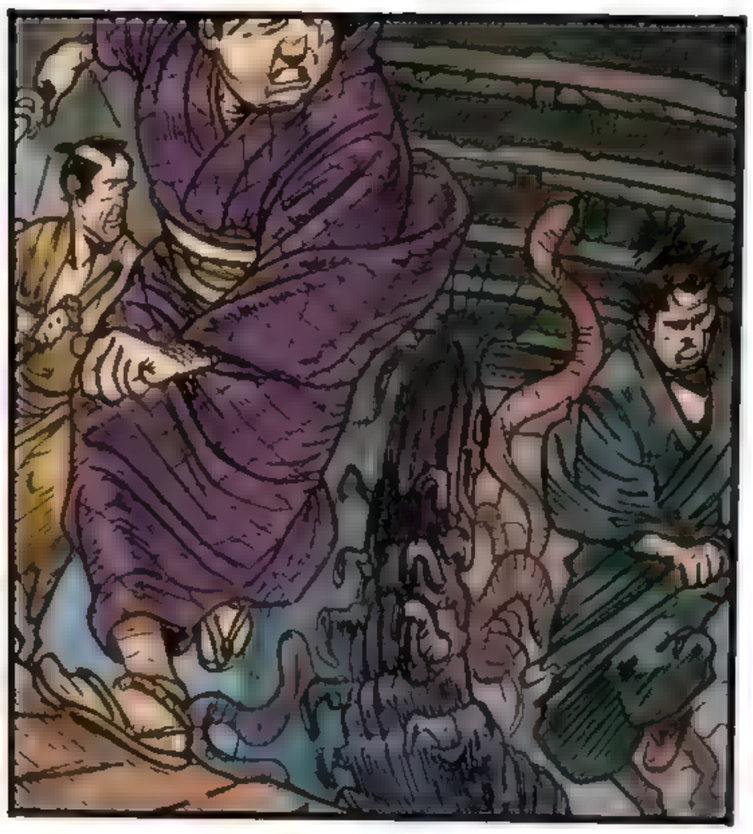
TSUBUSA!! WHAT WERE YOU SAYING ABOUT SADAKYO?! WHAT HAPPENED?!
SHE... SHE...

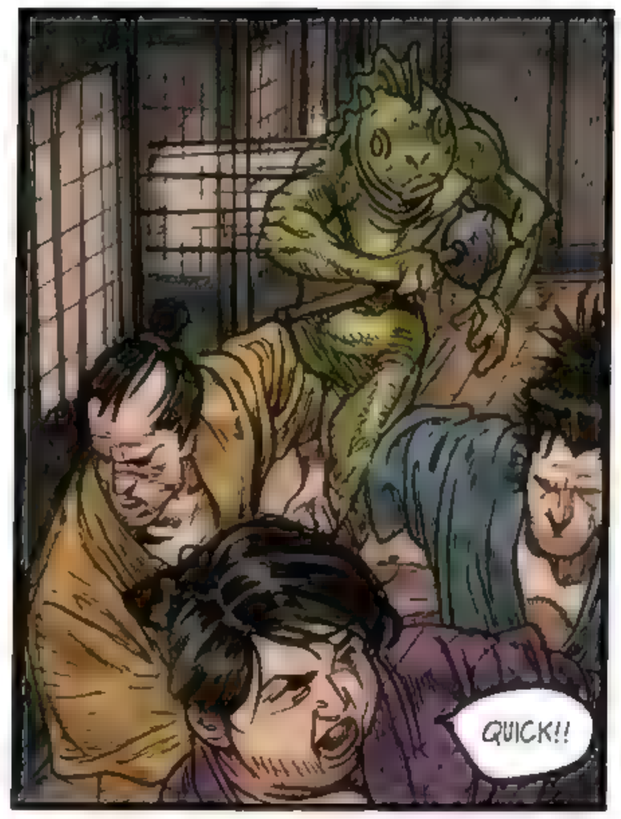
SHE WHAT?

SHE OPENED ...

..THE GATES OF HELL!!

RRRROOOOOOO
AAAAR
AKHH!!
BLARTCH
WE HAVE TO GET OUT OF HERE...
...RIGHT AWAY!



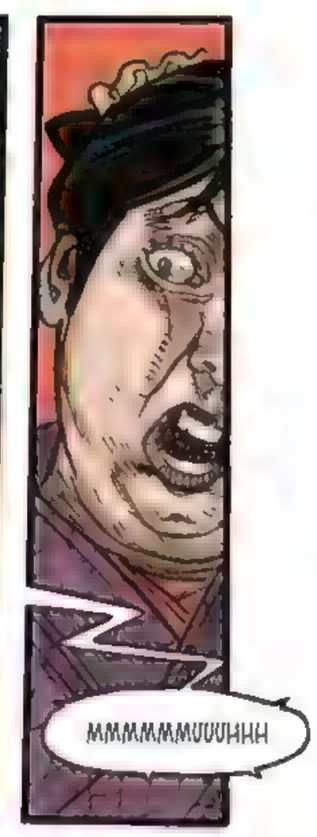

QUICK!!

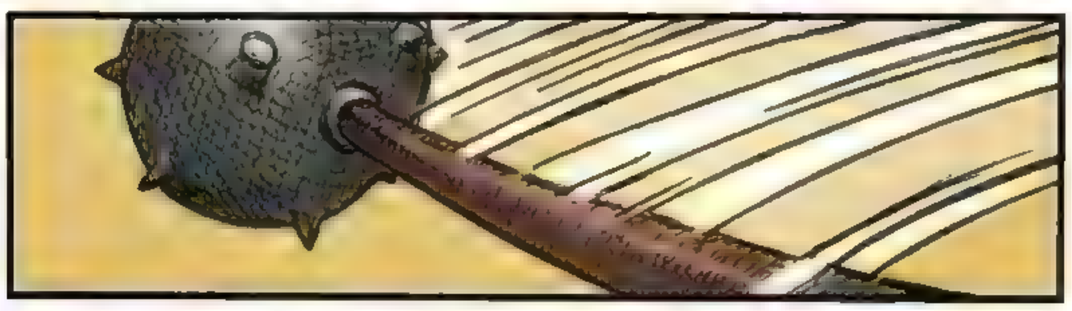
HERE!!

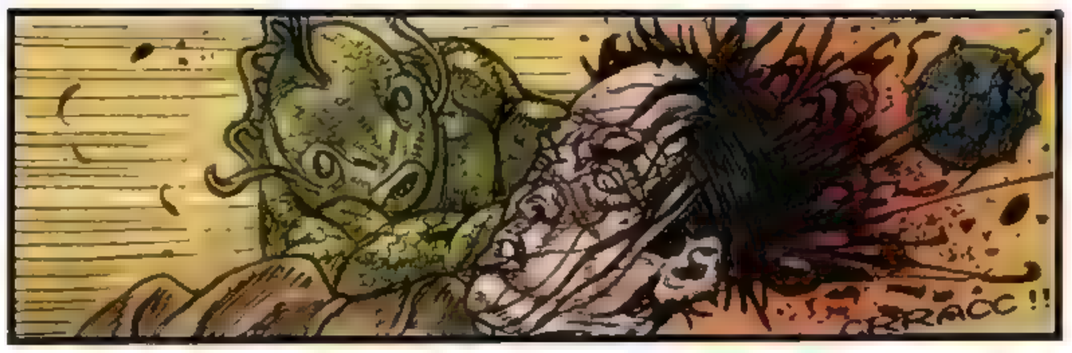
WHAT NOW?

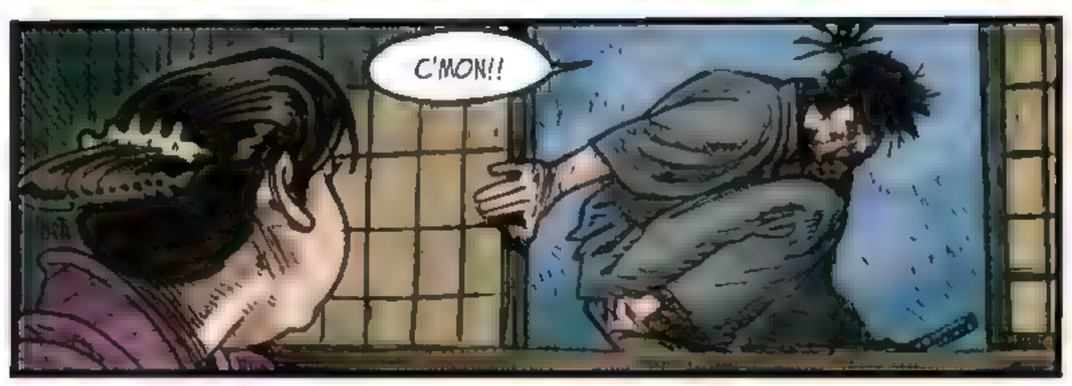
WE HAVE NO CHOICE...

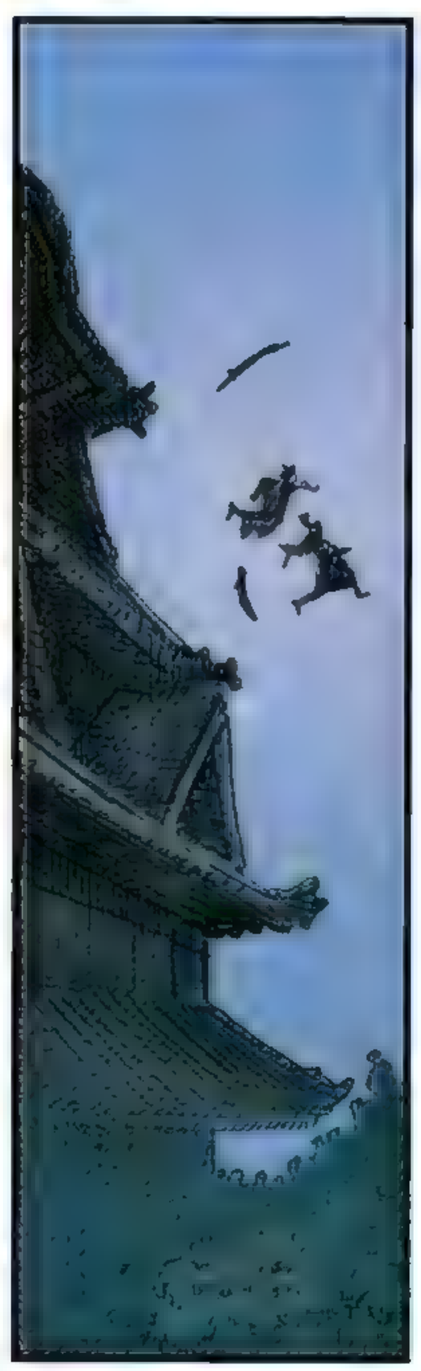
ARE YOU KIDDING?


MMMMMMUUUHHH

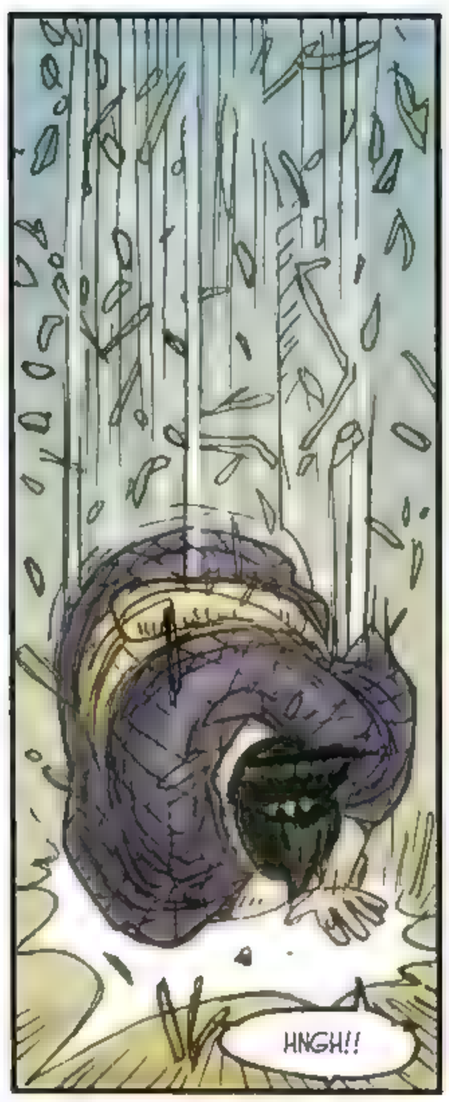



GRRACC!!


C'MON!!

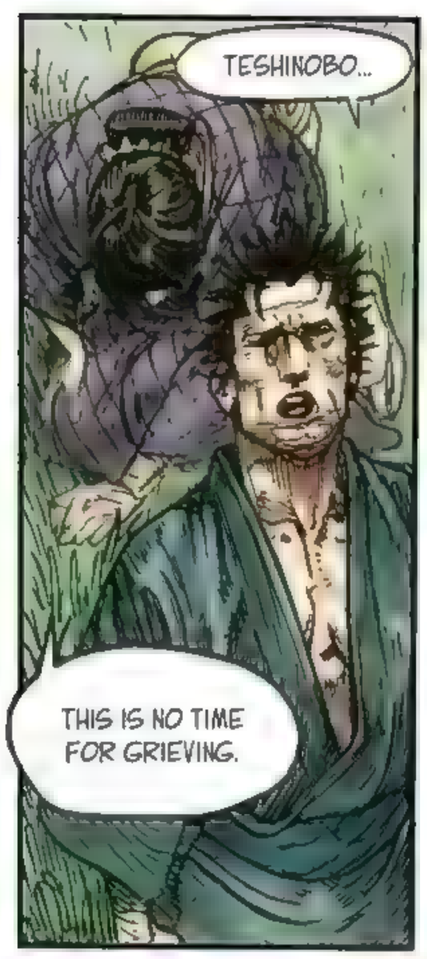


AAAAH!!


HNGH!!

OOF!!

RAAAAAAAAAHH...


TESHINOBO...
THIS IS NO TIME FOR GRIEVING.

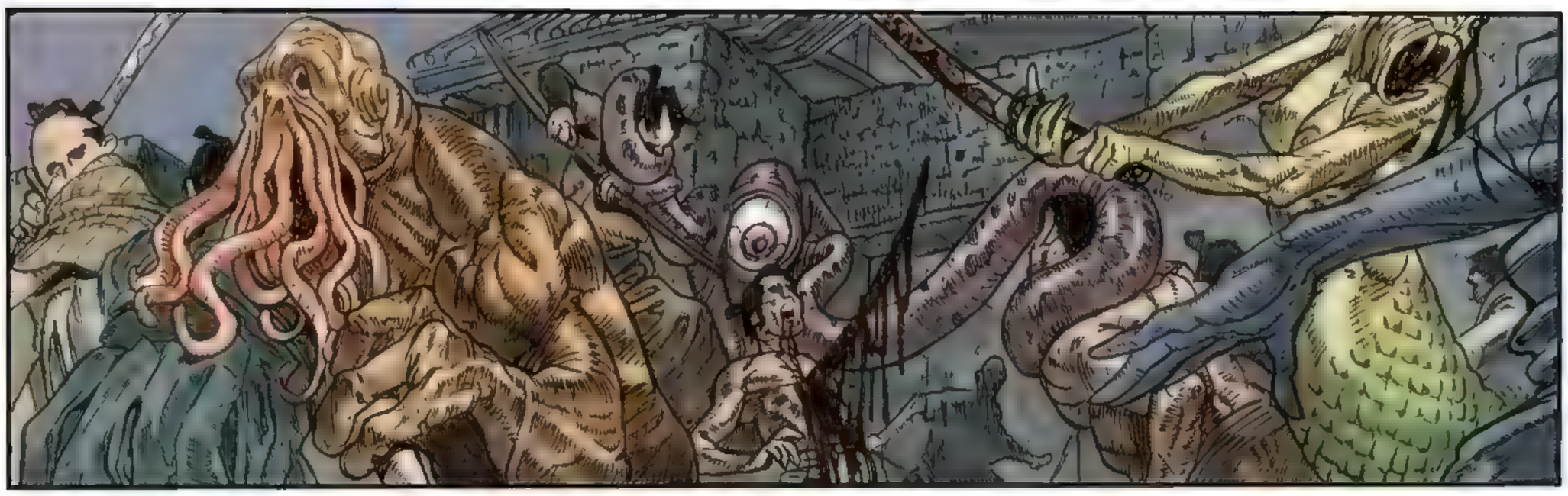
WHAT DO WE DO?
IT'S OBVIOUS!
WE GET OUT OF THIS HELL ON EARTH. AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE!!

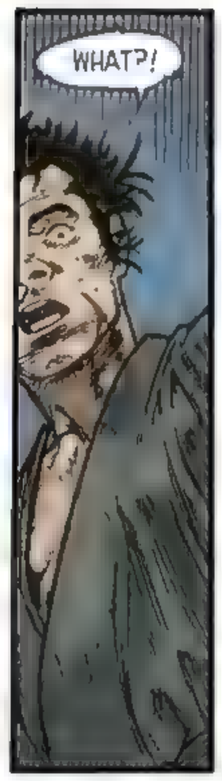
TSUBASA...
YES, WHAT?

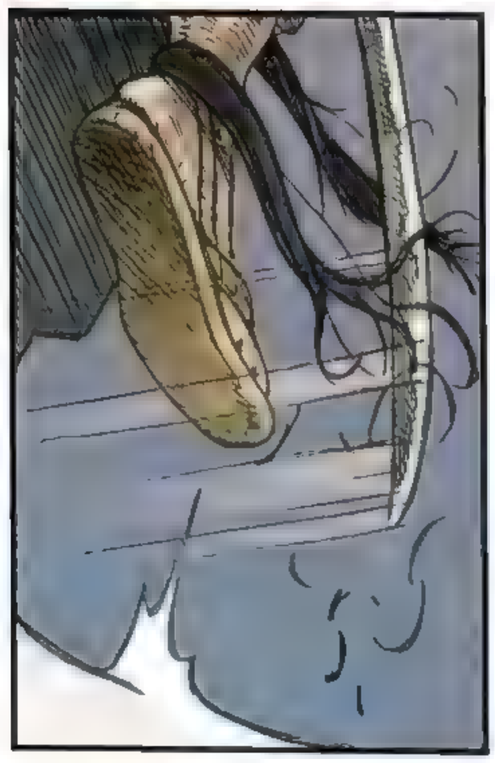
SHE SAID SADAKYO IS THE ONE RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL THIS.

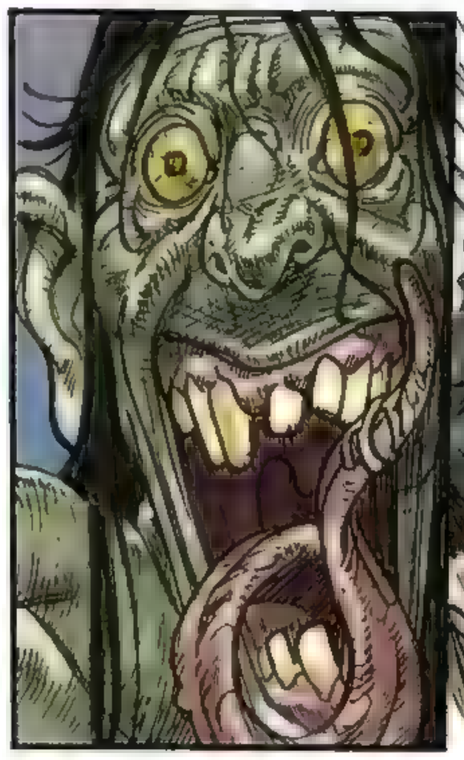
STOP YAMMERING AND HELP ME FIND MY SWORD.
IF THAT'S TRUE, THEN SHE'S THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN BRING IT TO AN END.

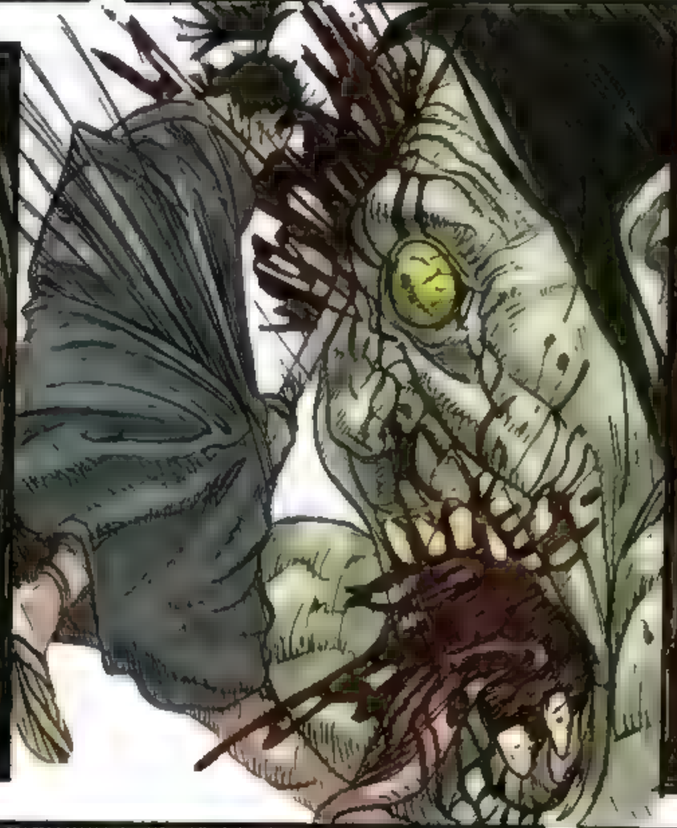
LISTEN TO ME. WE CAN'T LET THOSE DEMONS DESTROY THE CITY AND MASSACRE EVERYONE IN IT. IF SADAKYO IS THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN STOP ALL THIS, WE NEED TO FIND HER AND TALK SOME SENSE INTO HER. AS SOON AS POSSIBLE!!
WHAT ARE YOU--
MASAMURA!!

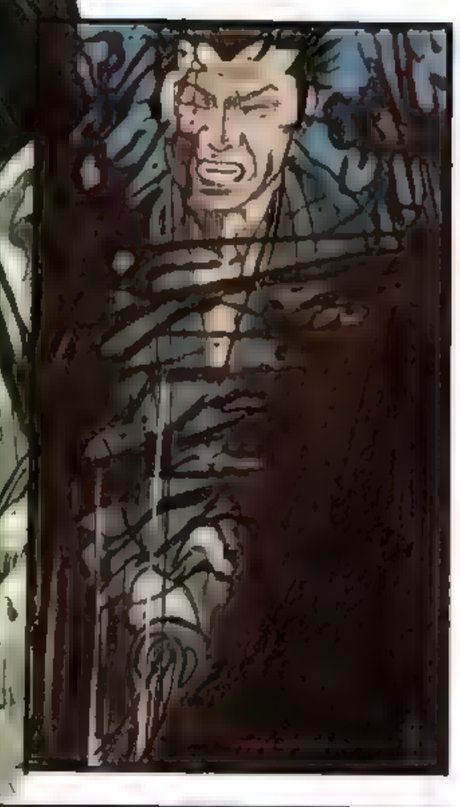


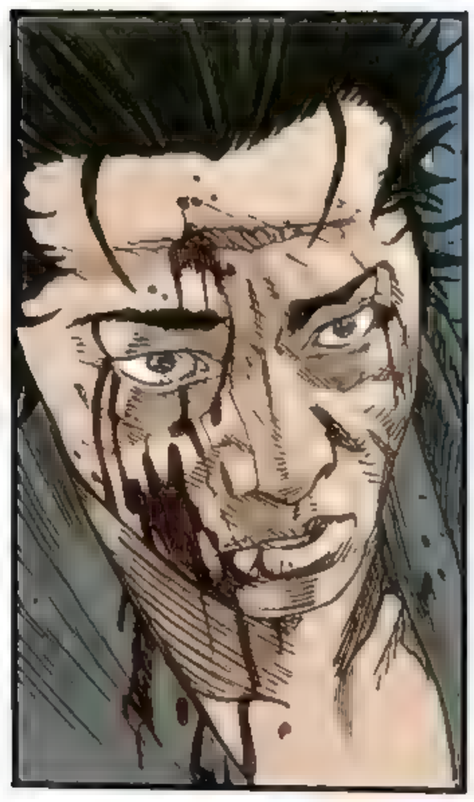

WHAT?!

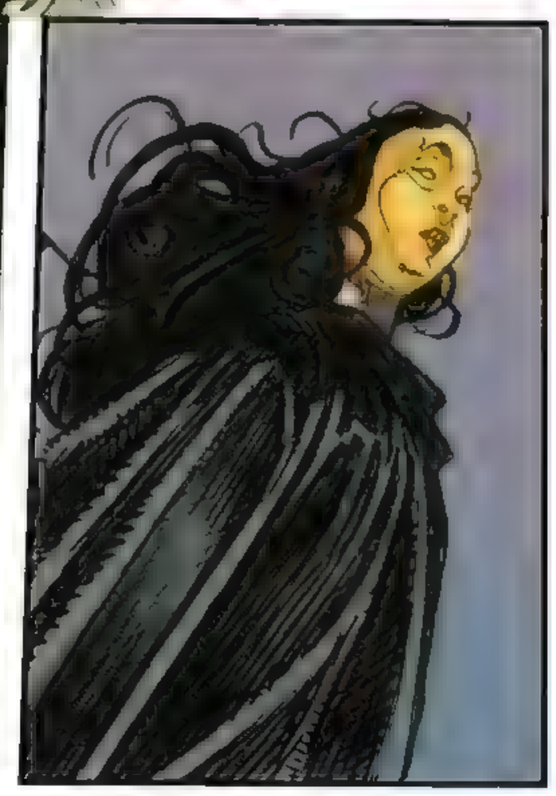


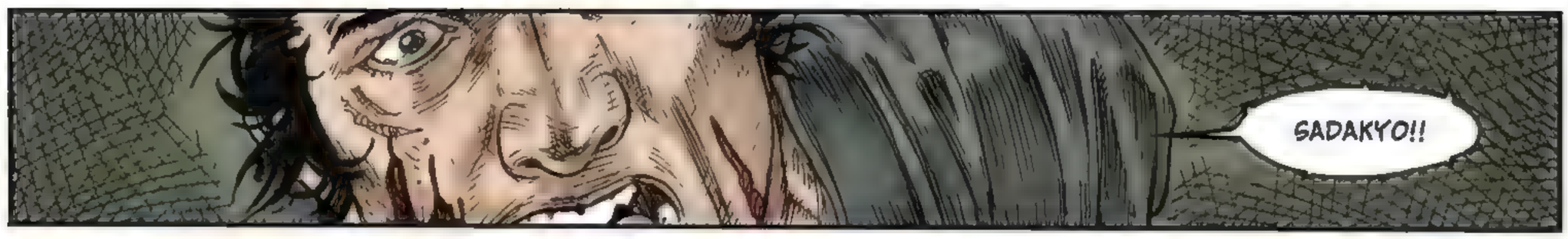











SADAKYO!!

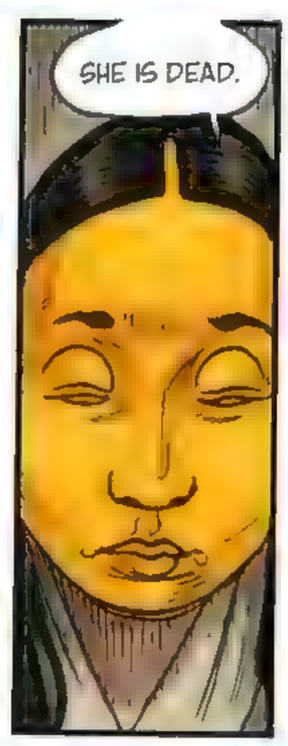
SADAKYO!!

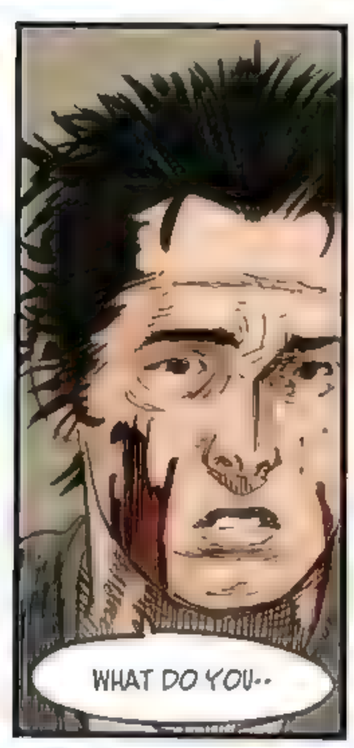
NO!

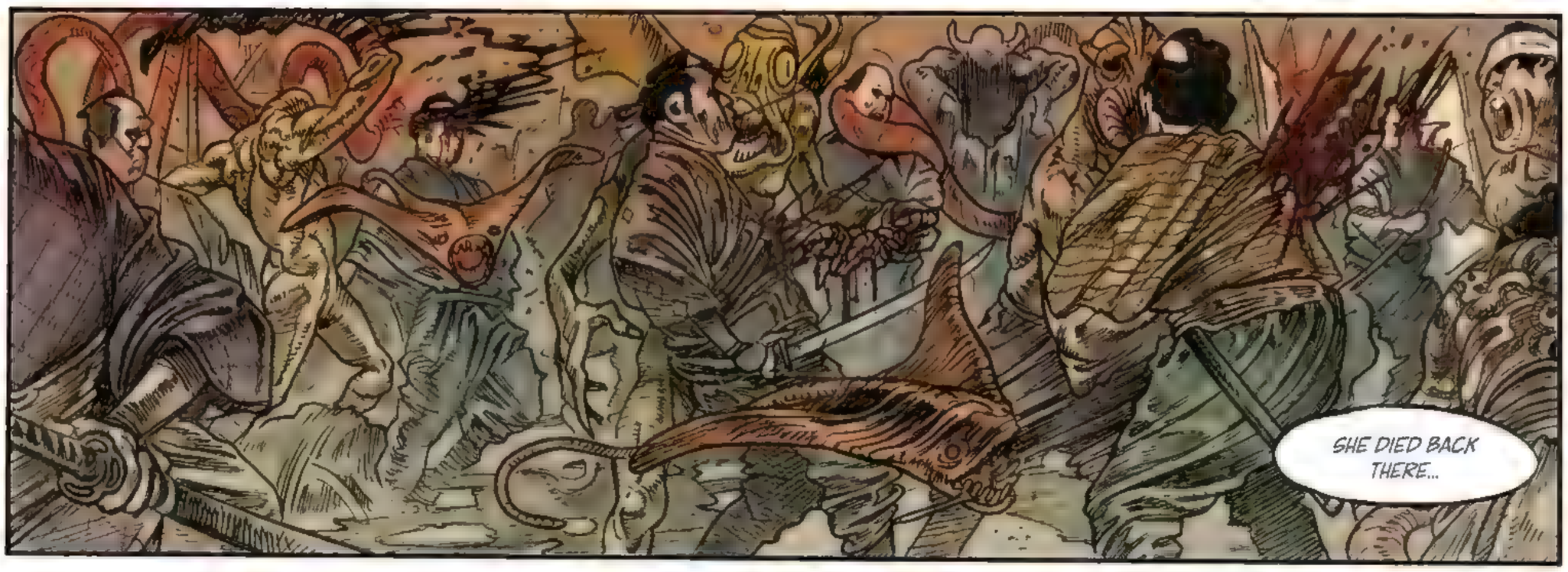
SADAKYO...
MASAMURA... NO!!

YOU CAN'T STAY HERE... GO AWAY!! RUN BACK HOME!!
AND LEAVE YOU BEHIND? NO, NEVER!!

BUT, MASAMURA, CAN'T YOU SEE WHAT I'VE BECOME?
THE SADAKYO YOU KNEW, THE ONE YOU HELPED, COMFORTED, CONSOLED, AND... LOVED IN SPITE OF EVERYTHING... SHE IS NO MORE!!


SHE IS DEAD.

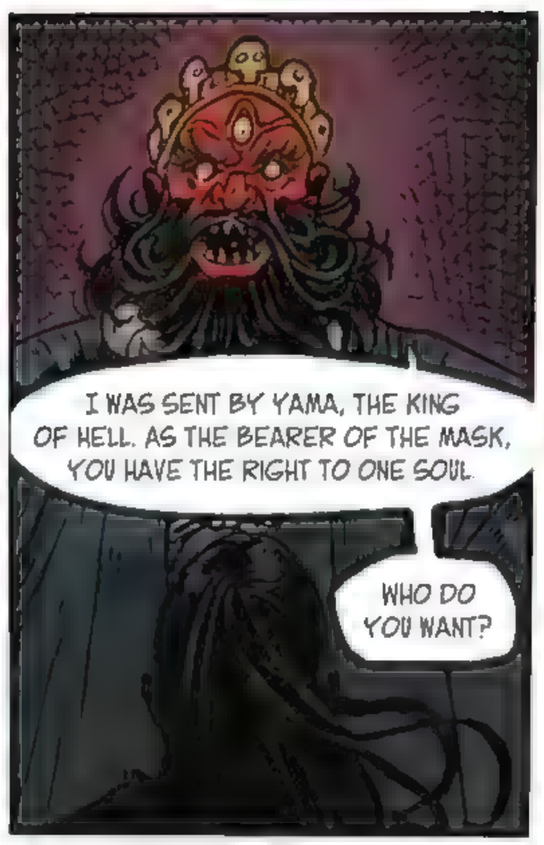

WHAT DO YOU--

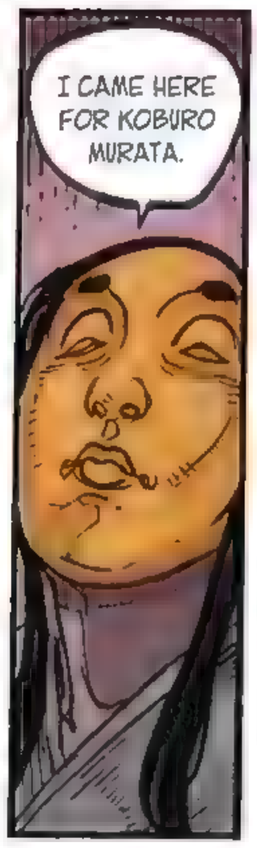

SHE DIED BACK THERE...

...WHEN SHE PUT ON THIS CURSED MASK.

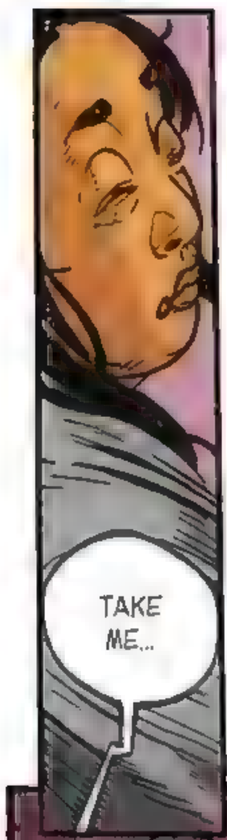
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?

WHAT.. WHO ARE YOU?


I WAS SENT BY YAMA, THE KING OF HELL. AS THE BEARER OF THE MASK, YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO ONE SOUL.
WHO DO YOU WANT?


I CAME HERE FOR KOBURO MURATA.

KOBURO... MURATA.. VERY WELL.
WAIT HERE.

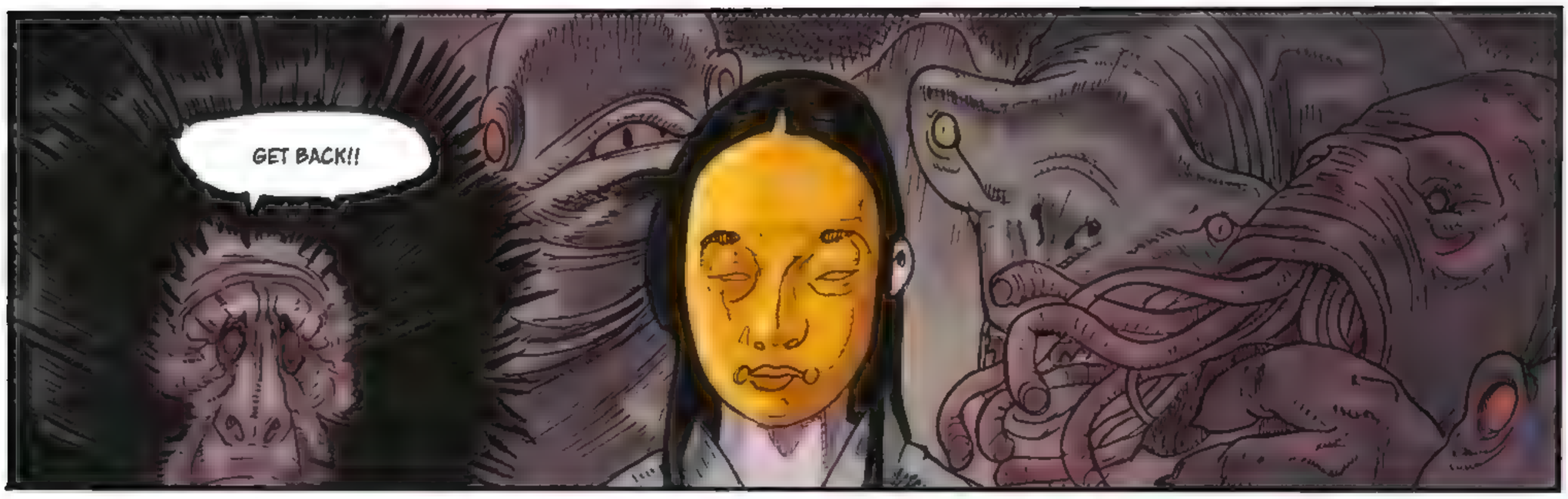

TAKE ME...

TAKE ME WITH YOU.

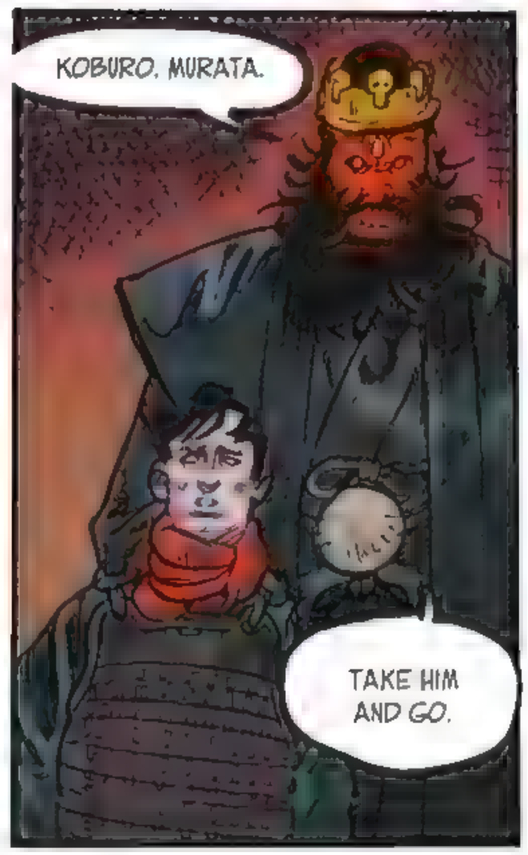
I'M TIRED OF ENDLESSLY TORTURING THE SAME SOULS... WHERE YOU COME FROM, THERE ARE... THERE ARE SO MANY MORE SOULS TO MAKE SUFFER.
PLEASE... TAKE ME WITH YOU.

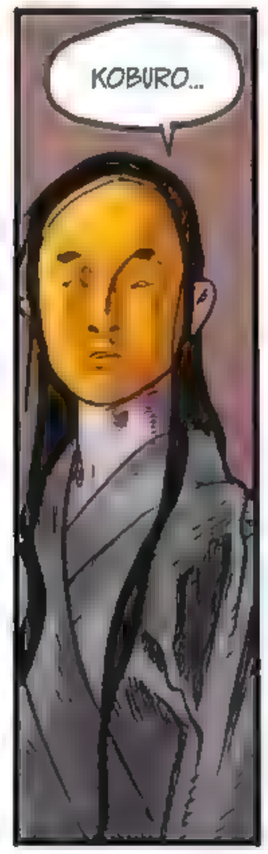
TAKE ME...
ME TOO...

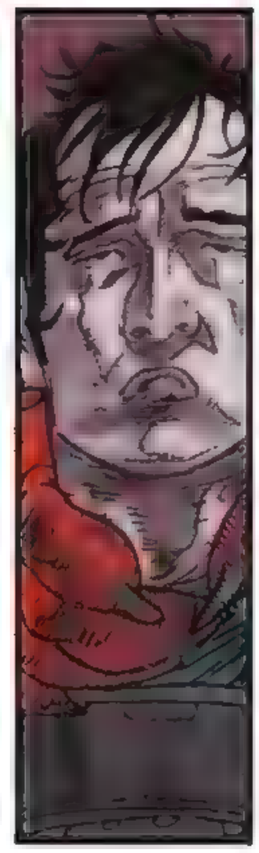
ME TOO..
ME TOO..
ME TOO...
ME TOO...
ME TOO...
ME TOO...
ME TOO...
ME TOO...


GET BACK!!

LET ME THROUGH!!


KOBURO, MURATA.
TAKE HIM AND GO.

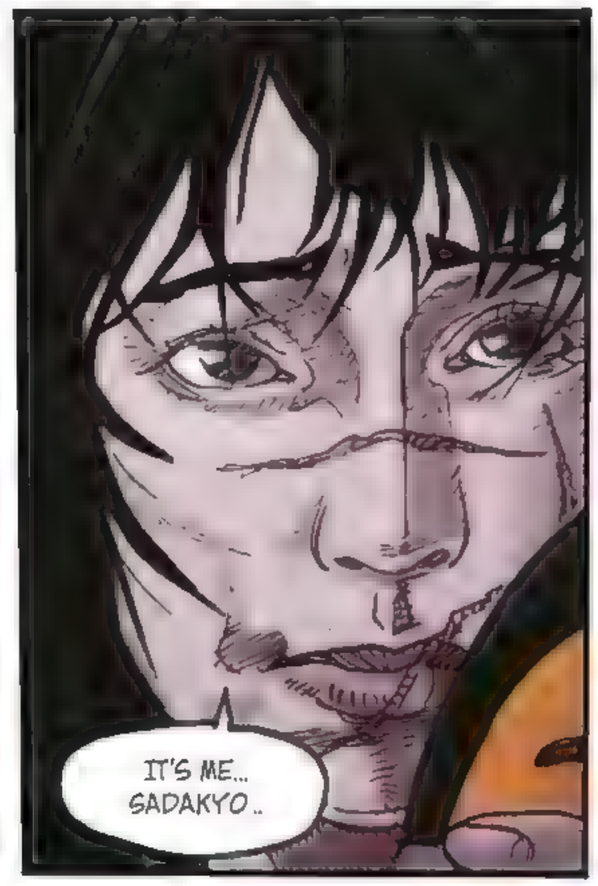

KOBURO...



KOBURO, MY LOVE...

WHO... ARE YOU?

WHY... IT'S ME...


IT'S ME... SADAKYO..

NO...
THE SADAKYO I KNOW IS BEAUTIFUL... AND SWEET... AND KIND..
KOBURO..

I DON'T KNOW WHO YOU ARE, BUT YOU AREN'T BEAUTIFUL OR SWEET.
YOU'RE HARD... YOU'RE COLD... YOU SCARE ME.

KOBURO, I'M BEGGING YOU...

DON'T TOUCH ME!!

THIS IS ANOTHER ONE OF YOUR CRUEL GAMES... YOU'RE A DEMON WHO TOOK ON HER LIKENESS TO TORTURE ME!!

DEMON!!
KOBURO!

KOBURO...

SHE TOOK OFF THE MASK...

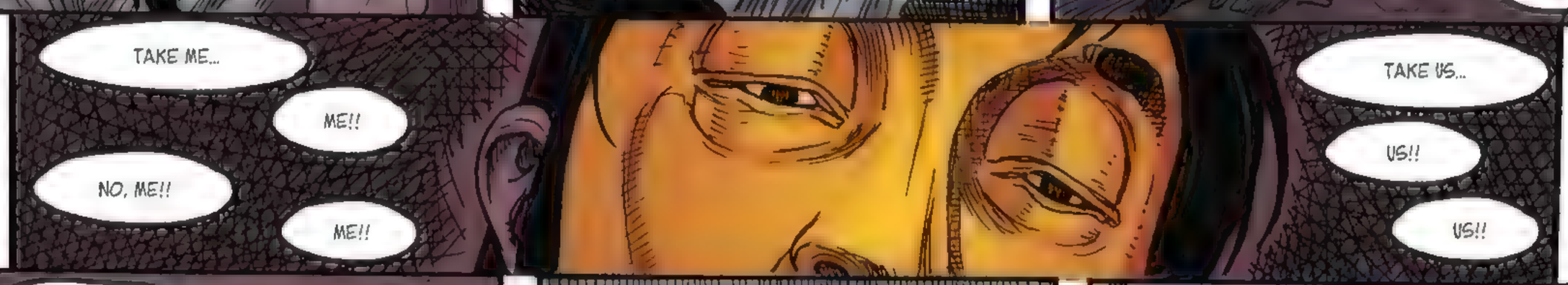
SHE TOOK OFF THE MASK...
SHE TOOK IT OFF..
..YES, THE MASK...

...YES, THE MASK...
OURS...
OURS...

NO!!
NO!!

SHE PUT THE MASK...
SHE PUT THE MASK BACK ON...
MASK BACK ON...

SHE'S LEAVING...
LEAVING...
TAKE ME...
ME!!


TAKE ME...
ME!!
NO, ME!!
ME!!
TAKE US...
US!!
US!!

QUIET!!

I'M GOING TO BRING YOU WITH ME, BACK TO THE WORLD THAT HAS CAUSED ME SO MUCH PAIN.

THIS WORLD THAT HAS HURT ME SO BADLY THAT IT DESERVES NOTHING MORE THAN TO SEE...

...THE GATES OF HELL OPENED WIDE!!

YOU...

YES, I OPENED THIS WORLD TO DEMONS!!

OPENED IT TO TORMENT, TO PAIN, TO SUFFERING. THE PRICE OF MY OWN TORMENT, MY PAIN, MY SUFFERING!!

I CROSSED AN OCEAN OF SUFFERING TO REACH HIM, BUT WHEN HE SAW ME... WHEN HE SAW WHAT I HAD BECOME...
HE REJECTED ME, DO YOU UNDERSTAND?!
REJECTED ME!!

I HORRIFIED HIM...

HORRIFIED...

COME WITH ME. LET'S LEAVE THIS MAD WORLD.
LET GO AWAY, TOGETHER!!

IT'S TOO LATE, MASAMURA.
I'M SORRY...

RRH...

THAT...

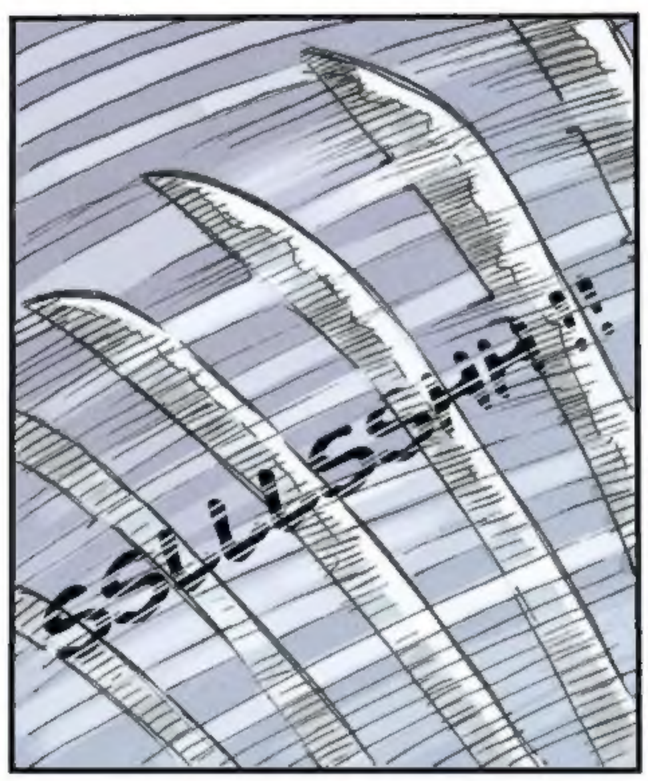
AHHH...

I'M SORRY.
NO?!!
SSHLASSH!!
OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOHHHHHHHHHHH!!
I'M SORRY, MASAMURA... BUT SOMEONE HAD TO DO IT.
MASAMURA, NO...

DON'T DO IT.
YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND... SHE'S...

I'M GOING TO FIND HER... I MUST FIND HER.

I MUST...



THE END

Thanks to David and Luca for their patience, their everlasting support, and everything they've taught me during this project. I would also like to thank my mother—I hope she's proud of me up there.
Roberto ALI

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Translation: Matt Madden
Editing: James Hogan
Lettering: Cromatik Ltd.
Original title: Le Masque aux mille larmes 2. Pour prix de mes tourments
Originally published in French by DARGAUD in 2021
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